"Stratagems To Unblind": Reflexivity and Existentialism in Three Novels by John Fowles

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes to re-examine John Fowles's self-reflexive practice and its interactions with existential themes on the basis that critical commentaries have not fully accounted for the rigour of his reflexive approach, nor for the complexity of its interrelations with existential philosophy, as it is used in his work.

In my introductory chapter, I give a brief outline of critical treatments of Fowles's reflexivity, identifying two broad approaches. The first of these suggests that a reflexive aesthetic is a means, for Fowles, of remaining within a realist frame in an age of epistemological scepticism about the validity of its premises. The second approach more explicitly links reflexivity to Fowles's existential scruples whereby the 'ontological guilt' engendered by the conscious control of novel-writing can be assuaged and a degree of 'authentication' achieved. Reflexivity, in other words, exposes the writer's own 'bad faith' and allows him to be purged of it, alongside his characters who engage in journeys of discovery, leading to greater self-knowledge and moral commitment, through the enabling medium of personal narrative. These approaches, I suggest, are limited in that they assume that Fowles's reflexive novels can be apprehended as a unified body of work located within a conservative poetics (thought to be peculiar to English fiction) and assimilated to a humanistic moral branch of existentialism.

My own method, then, is to attempt to look more closely at what I call the "reflexive positions" of each of the three novels under discussion and to account for their differing theoretical, epistemological and ontological affinities by establishing the critical contexts in which they reflexively situate themselves. This enables a more thorough examination of Fowles's *development* as a reflexive writer than has been offered thus far.

The careful specification of Fowles's reflexive commentaries, furthermore, allows for a critique of the assumption that his reflexivity is explicable entirely in terms of his existential commitment. The thrust of my argument is to throw into question the unproblematic alliance between aesthetic and philosophical concerns that commentators perceive in his work.

These issues are traced through Fowles's first three novels, *The Collector* (1963), *The Magus* (Revised Edition, 1977) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), each of which is treated in a separate chapter. My approach in these chapters is to specify clearly the "reflexive position" of the individual novel under discussion and then to examine critically its correlations with existential preoccupations. The resulting disruptions, contradictions and displacements I identify suggest a deviation in Fowles's work from the existential framework used to explain it and a growing concern with issues converging on postmodern and poststructuralist areas of inquiry, particularly the constitutive capacity of language, the decentering of the subject and the discursivity of what we call 'reality'. The typically recuperative positions Fowles's critics take up and the existentialist, moralist and humanistic grounds on which they interpret his work, I suggest, are inadequate to coping with his self-reflexive practice, necessitating such a reappraisal. A brief examination of his later novels in an appendix indicates that Fowles's movement away from humanist themes is anticipated in the earlier novels to a degree not widely recognised by critical commentaries.

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INTRODUCTION

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The definition of literary terms is a thorny but necessary prospect. This is particularly so when one is faced with a variety of equivalent terms which, nonetheless, bear subtle differences. In describing the self-interpretative fictional practice of John Fowles, for example, the choice of epithets – metafictional, self-conscious, self-reflexive – seems endless. Most full-length studies (Alter, Hutcheon, Waugh) of fiction of this sort have opted for the terms metafiction or self-consciousness to designate :

> ...fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. (Waugh, 2)

Siegle, however, points out that both these options are misleading and restrictive (4). The term "metafiction", meaning fiction about fiction, implies that such narratives will be "about "only" art and would tell us little else" (Siegle, 2). By limiting its concerns to aesthetic issues, the term bypasses the extent to which such narratives are able "to affect our view of reality, our essential values and philosophical assumptions" (2). "Self-consciousness", too, raises a host of problems: it "depends on metaphors of selfhood and consciousness" (Siegle, 3) which do not accord well with the more radical deconstructive strategies of some works, it presupposes a "myth of literature struggling toward a mature self- awareness" (3), thereby privileging modern literature, and it suggests "merely an occasional text, or even a moment in a text, given over to self-contemplation before getting on with the main business at hand" (Siegle, 4). As such, I will concur with Siegle in preferring the term "reflexivity" (self-reflexivity) since it is able to account for a narrative mode which does not simply turn in on itself, in a relatively frivolous and insignificant manner, but turns outwards to examine "the codes by which we organise reality,[1] the means by which we organise words about it into narrative, the implications of the linguistic medium we use to do so, the means by which readers are drawn into narrative, and the nature of our relation to "actual" states of reality" (Siegle, 3).

This is a crucial distinction, for reflexivity is not a monolithic phenomenon, as Hutcheon and Waugh's studies indicate.[2] Waugh, for example, traces:

> the sliding scale of metafictional practices from those novels which still implicitly invoke the context of the everyday world (though questioning its representations as simply a domain of common sense) through to those novels which shift context so frequently and so radically that the only frame of which the reader is certain is the front and back covers of the book he or she is reading. (115)

As such, each reflexive novel's self-inquiry is, to some extent, unique to itself, setting up "the theoretical frame of reference in which it must be considered" (Hutcheon, 1980, 6). Since the novel is the ultimate protean form, "we still cannot say what [it] is" (Holquist and Reed, 414). All we have, finally, are various institutionalised and canonised definitions of it – dependent on different sets of metaphors – that gain and lose ascendancy in the course of literary history. In this light, the platitude that reflexive novels proclaim their fictive nature is somewhat vague, since there is no such thing as a fictive nature *per se*. Each reflexive novel occupies a fictional concept equipped with distinct epistemological and ontological properties (hence prefiguring its relation to "actual" states of reality). This notion of reflexive novels as producing and inhabiting distinctive and identifiable fictive positions is a seminal one for the description and evaluation of Fowles's reflexive practice that follows.[3]

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In a climate where "the creator and the critic whose tasks until now completely self-contained, are beginning to inter-relate, perhaps even to merge" (Barthes, 1970, 135), John Fowles has been readily recognised as a writer whose novels straddle the divide between fiction and theory. Since the appearance of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, hailed as "Britain's closest approach to the canonical post-modernist novel" (Todd, 112), critical commentary has focused increasingly on the reflexive, experimental aspects of his work. While the multitude of such critical treatments in a growing Fowles industry prevents a comprehensive survey here, two overall trends may be discerned.[4]

One broad approach is to locate the source of Fowles's reflexive experiment within the context of a British – and indeed global – postwar uneasiness with "the aesthetic and epistemological premises of literary realism" (Lodge,

1977a, 101), dismissed by an academic and critical establishment that enjoys "considerable power, not least over novelists themselves" (Bradbury, 168). Anxiety about the discredited claims of expressive mimeticism motivates Fowles, together with a growing band of contemporaries, to break decisively with naive formalism. This is particularly in view of the stereotypical notions of parochialism, isolation and anti-experimentalism that have dogged the definition of the postwar English novel:

> ...the English novel has for far too long been regarded as a cosily provincial, deeply conservative, anti-experimental enterprise, resistant to innovation, rooted in mimesis and dedicated to the preservation of a tradition of realism casually related to that of the nineteenth century.(Ziegler and Bigsby, 9)

In this way, Fowles has been placed within a critical discourse that stresses resistance to "an incorrigibly insular England defending an obsolete realism against the life-giving invasions of fabulation" (Lodge, 1977a, 90). However, proponents of this critical frame have been unwilling to allow its creative exemplars to stray too far from the grounds of literary tradition and a vocabulary of caution and conservativism prevails in characterisations of their work. Lodge argues that "there is a good deal of evidence that the English mind is peculiarly committed to realism" (1977a, 88), an opinion echoed by Burden: "the persistence of...realist tradition indicates the controlling boundary on experiment in contemporary English fiction" (1979, 154). Thus, rather than abandoning realism, Fowles and his like-minded contemporaries are seen to occupy it cautiously, "building their hesitation into the novel itself" (Lodge, 1977a, 105).This simultaneous inhabiting and renunciation of the realist convention allows Fowles to be labelled both a "traditionalist and an experimentalist" (Ziegler and Bigsby, 113). Cast as a typical English artist mobilising a liberal poetics, Fowles may well nod in the direction of contemporary epistemological doubt but only within the context of an art nevertheless drawn to moral imperatives and the centrality of the individual in his/her historical world.

Eclipsing attempts to situate Fowles's reflexivity within a generalised English reaction to the burden of realist inheritance are accounts which undertake to specify the philosophical impulses behind his reflexive aesthetic. The extent to which Fowles's fiction has absorbed a version of existentialism similar to that of Sartre has been frequently recognised by commentators, as well as by the author himself:

> I'm interested in the side of existentialism that deals with freedom: the business of whether we do have freedom, whether we do have free will, to what extent you can change your life, choose yourself and all the rest of it. Most of my major characters have been involved in this Sartrean concept of authenticity and inauthenticity. (in Campbell, 1976, 466)

Fowles's "consensus notion" (Burden, 1980, 31) of existentialism, derived from a "collection of the more accessible ideas of Kierkegaard, Sartre and Camus" (31), is crystallised in *The Aristos*, his compilation of philosophical thoughts which reveal strong humanistic and individualistic tendencies.[5] Conceived as a defence of "the freedom of the individual against all those pressures-to-conform that threaten our century" (7), *The Aristos* pitches the self against a contingent and infinite reality – "an apparently endless ocean of apparently endless indifference to individual things" (16) – which Fowles alternatively refers to as "Hazard".[6] Given the conditions of a world that "exists in order to exist" (21), with "no amenable god in it, no particular concern or mercy" (28), humankind is "free to choose courses of action and so at least combat some of the hostile results of the general indifference of the process to the individual" (25). The affinity of this notion of the human being and reality to the by now popularised Sartrean injunction to choose "in the midst of indifference" (Sartre, 1943, 508) is obvious:

> You are free, therefore choose – that is to say, invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do; no signs are vouchsafed in this world.(1943, 298)

For Fowles, as for Sartre, the "nothingness" of a universe of non-conscious objects (what Sartre calls "beings-in-themselves") triggers the potentiality of the human being as he/she moves to counter what Fowles terms the "nemo" or "man's sense of his own futility and ephemerality; of his relativity, his comparativeness; of his virtual nothingness" (48). In this way, the individual becomes a "being-for-itself", an "agent" (Macquarrie, 135) who is able:

> both to perceive the world and also to act in it, determining his own course of action by reference to an imagined future. (Warnock, 1970, 94)

Thus, the human being has no "essence"; he/she is an "everlack, an infinite withoutness" (Fowles, 16) who is "free to fill the eternal gap in his nature in whatever way he chooses" (Warnock, 1970, 94) by fashioning a coherent and desired self.

Choice, in Fowles's philosophical system, does not imply a "radically open future" (Macquarrie, 157) since he speaks of a "hazard within bounds" (17):

"we are in fact confined to the courses of action available, perceivable and feasible to us" (65). This resembles the existential concept of "facticity" – the possibilities open within a particular situation. Since the human being is inevitably 'in the world', he/she is subject to a "human universality of conditions" comprising "all the limitations which a priori define man's situation in the universe" (Sartre, 1948a, 46). Choice arises out of a reaction to facticity, that is, the individual chooses to act in the face of the boundaries that threaten to determine his/her situation. Thus, limitations on possibility do not adversely affect choice since the individual is still free to evaluate and respond to particular conditions. As Sartre argues: "to be in a situation is to choose oneself in a situation" (1948b, 60).

While the individual acts on the world in order to imbue it with human and personal meaning, in a sense he/she also acts against it, in terms of its collectivisation into 'society' which stifles the individual impulse within its determining and, hence, inauthentic institutions.[7] The need to disengage from "stereotyping societies" (39) is a major emphasis of Fowles's thinking:

> The ordinary man and woman live in an asphyxiating smog of opinions foisted on them by society. They lose all independence of judgement and all freedom of action. (52).

Societal restraint is related to the need to control by means of categorisation: to cast others in fixed and predictable roles, thereby reducing them to the status of a thing. Fowles, then, appeals to the individual to resist objectification by means of responsible acts of free will, thereby escaping the deadening habitualisation of everyday constructs. The underlying condition of humankind, consequently, is its alienation. The individual is "left alone" to forge an authentic existence without "any means of justification or excuse" (Sartre, 1948a, 34): without recourse to any higher or independent 'truth'.

In general, however, Fowles's philosophy is an optimistic one, affirming and, indeed, celebrating the individual's ability to achieve 'authentic selfhood' (or what Sartre terms "transcendence") in the experience of freedom and in the pursuit of genuine and self-chosen human values. Taking this existential portrait of self and world as the grounds of a fictional practice, critics have typically recovered the Fowlesian novel in terms of a proliferation of existential motifs – freedom, choice, responsibility, action and selfhood – eliciting the comment that "the principal thematic concerns of Fowles's fiction may be called existential" (McSweeney, 307).[8] The prototypical situation in Fowles's work is conceived as the progress of a centred self away from the

inauthenticities and determinisms of the social contract of his/her time towards the compensatory, private vision of an expanded self-consciousness.

Existential concerns have not been confined to theme, however. By transplanting them to the formal aspect of the novel, critics have opined that an intimate linkage is established between aesthetic (reflexive) and philosophical issues in Fowles's work. On the level of plot, narrative is seen as a means of privileged access to an authentic self, as characters are both taught by, and themselves manipulate, a storytelling faculty in the quest for existential self-creation. Paradoxically, however, narrative is equally a threat to existential consciousness, opaquely blocking out that contingency/reality which fuels authentic awareness. In this light, Fowles's self-reflections are explained in terms of the novelist's existential discomfort with the manipulation and power intrinsic to his art: "the process of invention is itself the source of values. But it is also the origin of coercion" (Ziegler and Bigsby, 113). This results in what Loveday describes as an "ambivalent attitude to his chosen fictional form and perhaps to the whole enterprise of fiction" (3). Self-exposure is a means of avoiding the *mauvaise foi* entailed by the 'tyranny' of conscious novelistic control, particularly in the light of realism's perceived "collaboration with the epistemological and political status quo" (Conradi, 21). Reflexivity, thus, is seen as a consequence of the drive for authentication within an awareness of the enduring seductiveness of the novel form. The promotion of the fictiveness of the structures he manipulates allows Fowles to present a vision of art which both incorporates, and gives way to, existential contingency (or "Hazard"), effecting a liberation of his readers who become surrogates for the characters whose fates he cannot help arranging. In this way, reflexivity engenders a triple-tiered emancipation: of the fiction itself which becomes aware of its own limits, of the reader who is returned to an engagement with the contingency of his/her world and of the novelist who is shriven of his 'bad faith'.

A plethora of such critical articles have sprung up, explaining Fowles's reflexive devices in terms of "literary conventions which accurately depict reality as the existentialist sees it" (Cohen, 161). Or, as Loveday asserts, "...at the deepest level Fowles's fictional practice bears out his contention that freedom of the will is the highest human good" (7). Reflexive play with authorial roles, novel endings and literary conventions becomes assimilated to an existential moral vision, as my review of extant critical readings will reveal.

While yielding some illuminating insights, such approaches have limited the systematic attention paid to the development of Fowles as a reflexive writer, apart from commonplace observations about the progress of his reflexive forms. Those who have written in terms of his growth as self-interpretative writer tend to do so in the context of the unity of such development. McSweeney's remark that Fowles's "informing fictional themes and underlying strategies of narrative presentation have to a remarkable degree remained constant" (305) sets the tone for the stress on the uniformity of Fowles's output that is typical of his commentators. Binns, too, emphasises the "generic continuity" (1973, 331) and "existential continuity" (1973, 318) of Fowles's first three novels, locating them within a romance convention. Eddins's existential reading sets up "the sequence of novels itself" as an "analogous structure" (207) to a system of dialectical interplay between "paradigmatic form and contingent reality" (Kermode, qtd. in Eddins, 204):

> If *The Collector* is crystallised and unselfconscious ideation, a fiction pretending to autonomous existence, then the next two novels represent a progressive iconoclasm that proclaims the fictiveness of their own enterprises. This heightened self-consciousness, with its rich ironic implications, is accomplished partly by Fowles's use of an author-persona... who obtrudes more and more (208)

In this manner, technical innovations are explained by reference to a unified (existential) thematic concern.

While the preoccupations of Fowles's fiction do undoubtedly remain constant in the course of the first three novels, I believe that a stress on unity blurs the subtle differences that lend complexity and interest to his reflexive approach. While his novels arguably *all* belong to the mode that Hutcheon calls "diegetic metafiction" (1980) which foregrounds its narrative and representational procedures, they do so with considerably different degrees of overtness and technical sophistication. Furthermore, following the assertion that reflexive novels "explore a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction" (Waugh, 2), I will argue that each of the three novels under discussion constructs and locates itself within a distinct 'theory' or conception of fiction.

In a bid to explore the complexity of Fowles's practice, I will examine the shifting nature of his self-reflexive commentaries and the subtle permutations of their theoretical positions, as they project themselves into varying traditions, constructs, epistemologies and ontologies. My argument will account for a progressive shift in Fowles's reflexive development in the course

of his first three novels within a recognition of the differing assumptions about art, its role and status, its relations with reality (and a host of subsidiary issues) constructed by each novel's self-theorising.

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A brief sketch of these differing assumptions or reflexive positions can only look reductive, bereft of their textual anchorings. It is offered, however, in the spirit of the provision of a necessary critical context to the more detailed discussions of the individual novels that follow.

To describe *The Collector* as a reflexive work is problematic since it is overtly neither self-interpretative nor self-interrogative. However, its double narrational structure serves as a *mise en abyme*, allowing the narrative to "repeat itself or comment upon itself internally" (Dallenbach, 440) via its protagonists who serve as surrogate author figures. In this light, I will argue that the reflexive mode in the novel is paradoxical since *The Collector* consciously and directly aligns itself with a *mimetic* theory of art wherein thematic content supersedes form. Thus, it explicitly situates itself not only within an Aristotelian conception of imitation, whereby the novel transparently transmits aspects of an anterior reality, but, more specifically, within an expressive tradition:

> A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. The primary source and subject matter therefore are the attributes and actions of [the writer's] own mind; or if aspects of the external world then only these as they are converted from fact to [art] by the feelings and operations of [the writer's] mind. (Abrams, 22)

These "feelings and operations" of the artist's mind are defined as essentially moral in *The Collector*, so that it places itself within a continuum of humanistic artistry laid down by Leavis's "Great Tradition". Insofar as it is reflexive about its proceedings, then, *The Collector* signals an awareness of working in a particular moral and mimetic prescription and asks to be read in the light of liberal-human values of truth, morality and the coherent self, or, in fictional terms, in the context of fully-fleshed characters acting in a solid world of recognisable values reflective of the 'real' world and expressive of the author's moral vision.

While *The Magus* partly shares this notion of the novel as receptacle of 'human truths', as embodied in *The Collector*, it shifts its focus to its fictional condition, whereby "the fictional content of the story is continually reflected by its formal existence as text" (Waugh, 15). In this way, it realigns its relationship with the real, insisting that it is a verbal construct rather than a description or replication of a reality prior to language. As Hutcheon puts it, "Inner coherence replaces inner/outer correspondence" (1980, 42), calling the notion of the transparent sign into question. As such, *The Magus* approaches a declaration of the ontological autonomy of art, relocating 'truth' within the ordering aesthetic processes of the creative imagination. The fictional universe is a self-contained world or "heterocosm" (Hutcheon, 1980, 89) creating its own internally referenced 'truth' or validity. By highlighting the imaginative process by means of which it creates its own orders, *The Magus* flaunts its 'shapeliness', and, by extension its fictive powers.

This self-reflexive elevation of fictional language, according it a supreme value which supercedes 'life', corresponds closely to what may be called a modernist reflexivity. Alter's discussion of the modernist revival of what he calls "self-conscious" fiction stresses the transcendence of fictionality:

> There are moments when artifice will seem not a reflection on or a transformation of reality but the only reality one can count on. (Alter, 144)

Similarly, Fletcher and Bradbury's modernist "introverted novel" draws attention to "the autonomy of the fictive structure itself" (396) so that "language ceases to be what we see through and becomes what we see" (401). Here too, modernist reflexivity is conceived of in terms of an exploration of the "poverty of reality and the powers of art" (402):

> Art is... the central illumination; it alone can give pattern or form which in turn makes significance out of what would otherwise be a contingent sequence. (402)

As Russell sees it, modernist formal innovation "represented a search for an aesthetic dimension of significance, meaning and value" (184). By "consciously devaluing the referential dimension of the artwork...and by explicitly emphasising its formal conventions", modernist reflexive art "[laid] bare realms of spiritual or aesthetic significance in a debased social domain" (Russell, 184). As will be shown, this is an apt description of the reflexive position of *The Magus* .

This is not to suggest that *The Magus* is a modernist novel as such, since it lacks many of the features of the construct "Modernism", but that its

self-reflexive postulation of the novel as imaginative construct conforms roughly with the frame of reference provided by modernist reflexive concerns. Thus, while *The Collector* is content to suggest that we can 'know' the world by its transparent mediations, *The Magus* proposes that we can 'know' only through the mental constructs of our consciousness which, in turn, gain ontological ascendancy, forming a new ground for 'reality'. As Lodge puts it, "From the position that art offers a privileged insight into reality there is a natural progression to the view that art creates its own reality" (1977b, 48). This carries important implications for the concept of the author in *The Magus* which is revealed as:

> a transcendental imagination fabricating, through an ultimately monologic discourse, structures of order which will replace the forgotten material text of the world. (Waugh, 16)

Character, too, is revealed as textually and hermetically constructed. Even the reading process is redefined as a co-creation of the fictional universe by means of accumulating and interpreting fictional codes:

> It is... by the gradual, cumulative constructing of the heterocosm through its (acknowledged) fictive reference that readers can be said to share a text or a novelistic universe. (Hutcheon, 1980, 95)

While the theoretical position outlined above may be said to be dominant in *The Magus*, it also contains (if minimally) what can be termed a postmodern reflexivity. This minor shift paves the way for *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles's most overt early reflexive fiction, which contextualises itself in terms of a constitutive postmodern theory. McHale's warning that "There is no postmodernism "out there" in the world any more than there ever was a Renaissance or a romanticism "out there" " (4) is fitting, given the intricacies and vicissitudes of the "postmodern debate". I will thus not attempt to sort through the numerous categorising and periodising constructs which have been made in the name of the "postmodern".[9] It is sufficient to say that I will not be dealing with postmodernism in the context of consumer capitalism (Jameson, Eagleton, Habermas, among others) nor with the aleatory experiments of the American fabulators or the French *nouveau romanciers* which have often been claimed for postmodernism. My discussion will be based predominantly on the lucid and moderate model of postmodernism constructed by Hutcheon (1988, 1989) which avoids the more grandiose claims for postmodernism's radical indeterminancy staked by Lodge (1977b), Hassan, Butler and Fokkema, among others:

> The socio-code of postmodernism is based on a preference for non-selection or quasi non- selection (Fokkema, 42).

Instead, Hutcheon proposes that postmodern art forms deliberately and simultaneously install and subvert liberal-humanist and 'commonsense' discourses in order to challenge them internally through parodic or critical irony. Postmodernism "deconstruct[s], displace[s], decenter[s], demystif[ies] the logocentric, ethnocentric, phallocentric order of things" (Hassan, 445). Thus, as a mode that seeks to "expand the signifiable" (Kristeva, 137), postmodernism does not suggest an abandonment of meaning, of truth, of hierarchical order:

> What it does say is that there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world – and that we create them all. That is their justification and their limitation. They do not exist "out there", fixed, given, universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history. This does not make them any the less necessary or desirable. It does, however... condition their "truth" value. The local, the limited, the temporary, the provisional are what define postmodern "truths". (Hutcheon, 1988, 43)

Postmodern novels self-reflexively foreground their fabricated, coded nature in order to point to the existence of 'ontologies'- the multitude of possible 'worlds' which comprise social reality which is a "plurality of available ontological orders" (McHale, 37). McHale, in fact, characterises postmodernism in terms of an "ontological dominant", interrogating the constitution of 'worlds' (10). However, I would concur with Hutcheon that postmodernism "asks both epistemological and ontological questions" (1988, 50). While it is concerned to question the nature and status of the constructs that form 'reality', it does not deny their existence or conceive of reality as a formless flux. Instead, it attempts to dissect the power relations, the socio-historic forces that institutionalise these provisional constructs as 'truth' – to "define the conditions of that truth" (Hutcheon, 1988, 13).

Thus, in its recourse to an extra-literary realm of socially inscribed, culturally conditioned and ideological meanings, postmodernism participates in "the paradoxes set up when modernist aesthetic autonomy and self-reflexivity come up against a counterforce in the form of a grounding in the historical, social and political world" (Hutcheon, 1988, ix). Indeed, it seems to resolve the "most powerful debate of the modern novel...between the art that makes its appeal to its own internal universe and the art that makes it to the reality and texture of the material world and the social order" (Fletcher and Bradbury, 411). The relationship of postmodernism to modernism has aroused much controversy.[10] Postmodernism has been read, alternatively,

as a radical break from modernism (Hassan) or as a logical continuation of its concerns (Graff). Hutcheon convincingly suggests that postmodernism properly accepts both models (1988, 51), however, in view of its doubled nature which "juxtaposes and gives equal value to the self-reflexive and the historically grounded: to that which is inward-directed and belongs to the world of art (such as parody) and that which is outward-directed and belongs to 'real life' (such as history)" (Hutcheon, 1989, 2). By simultaneously employing modernist strategies of formal self-scrutiny and questioning the subsequent sealing-off of art from life, the postmodern novel performs a double move that "self-consciously incorporate[s] and equally self-consciously challenge[s] that modernism from which it derives..." (Hutcheon, 1988, 52).

However, if the postmodern novel restores a referential function, it does so on a new level. The 'reality' it refers to is not a stable, neutral 'given' but a "series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures" (Waugh, 7) bound up by and knowable within a system of socio-historic signification and articulation. As Russell puts it, "Insofar as [the postmodern artwork] seeks a world of significance external to itself, the world is described as a network of socially established meaning systems, the discourse of our culture" (183). The novel, thus, reflexively appeals to its conventional construction in order to reveal the 'world' as an ideologically overdetermined fabrication.

In the transition from *The Magus* to *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, then, we witness an evolution from fictionality to discursivity. While not denying the workings of the creative imagination, postmodern reflexivity serves to *situate* them within an ideologically-motivated nexus of novel conventions and socio-historical discourses. In this way, fictional language is de-privileged and robbed of its autonomous, transcendental status. As Hawkes asks, "If everything is capable of signifying, why should the literary mode be dominant? " (145). Since this is the case, no narrative can be a natural "master narrative" (Hutcheon, 1988, 13) and the task of postmodernism becomes that of unmasking the inevitable transience of aspiring "master narratives". As such, fiction modulates from a unified and harmonious totality – a closed system – to a fractured and multi-form construct whose 'truth' has lost "any status or finality" (Young, 6). If this sounds unduly nihilistic, in the sense that "postmodernism has a content and a self-concept...mainly in terms of negation" (Nägele, 6), it should be emphasised that postmodernism is also to some degree a reconstructive mode, affirming the

centrality and indispensibility of narrative in the process of meaning-making, while disallowing the value-free neutrality or uncontested dominance of any representation.

The relation of text to specific discursive and materialist practices (what Derrida calls "*hors texte*") reverberates into the conceptions of character and author proposed by postmodern reflexivity which "goes beyond self-reflexivity to situate discourse in a broader context" (Hutcheon, 1988, 41). The post-structuralist "critique of the classical conception of the unitary subject" (Young, 12) is crucial to the postmodern understanding of character. By positioning the subject in discourse (*parole*), it is shown to be dispersed in language, existing at the interface of institutionalised and pre-coded meanings, rather than originating meaning from a unified consciousness. Thus, while *The French Lieutenant's Woman* invokes the familiar concept of 'person', utilising stably realised characters in keeping with a liberal-humanist notion of the coherent ego, it does so in order to challenge this 'commonsense' idea. By self-reflexively tying character to novel conventions which are, in turn, related to concrete material conditions, the "individual in society" is defined as "a language-using, social and historical entity" (Coward and Ellis, 1). In this way, the novel embraces "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin), creating a polyphonic interplay of discourses by which characters/subjects are traversed.

The author, similarly, while still serving as a reference and centre of stability, is shown to be occupying a role, complete with governing rules and conventions. Siegle, for example, describes the author, as revealed in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, as a "textual mechanism in one discourse or another" (130). The concept of the author is exposed as a "position to be filled, a role to be inferred" (Hutcheon, 1980, xvi) rather than an individual biographical personage or a creative imagination prior to the text.

The postmodern reflexive position of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (and to a minimal extent *The Magus*), thus, attends to the novel's status as a web of socially constituted signifying practices, inextricably enmeshed with and implicated in material, discursive and ideological processes.

Within this typology of reflexive positions, Fowles actively negotiates with various theories and traditions in order to find a placing for his work, providing "an endless internal speculation about the nature of art which, simultaneously, the artist is creating" (Fletcher and Bradbury, 395). The

arena of this speculation modulates from the championing of the moral function of fiction to the dismantling of the ideological underpinnings of what we call the moral, from the conscious construction of a privileged literary language to the radical questioning of the very notion of a privileged language, from a nostalgic occupation of a mimetic theory to a thoroughgoing examination of the relationship of the novel to the 'real'. The concern to interrogate received categories of novelistic practice penetrates into the familiar concept of character: initially drawing on the notion of stable and recognisable agents who may be abstracted from the fictional work, subsequently revealing them as textually constructed and, finally, as conventionally and ideologically constituted. The author, too, traverses a field ranging from purveyor of moral meaning sealed into a work, to transcendent creator working through the elevated imagination, to 'producer' located within the discourses of the text. 'Truth', 'meaning' and their relationship to the novel are continually investigated, redefined and refined as Fowles's reflexive positions give way to each other.

While I have categorised roughly three differing reflexive modes, corresponding with realist, modernist and postmodernist concerns, it is best, at the outset, to disavow any rigid causal links between theories of language and literature and Fowles's self-reflexive novels. As Creighton explains:

> Criticism necessarily exists in a symbiotic relationship to literature and... writers and critics alike are nurtured by prevailing climates of opinion, by similar ways of perceiving during particular time periods. (216)

Thus, while the impact of contemporary inquiries into language and literature is registered in the progression of Fowles's reflexive explorations, his novels contribute to the current linguistic-literary debate in a reciprocal manner.

iv

In view of this specification of Fowles's theoretical positions in his first three novels, it is my contention that neither a conservative, liberal "English" poetics nor an extrapolation of an existentialist, humanist vision sufficiently encompasses Fowles's reflexive practice.[11]

A categorisation within a traditional English mould, for example, is misleading and belies the complexity of Fowles's reflexive investigation of novelistic realism and the interaction of fiction and the 'real'. *The Collector*, as I have

suggested, approvingly situates itself within an expressive, mimetic frame, bearing no trace of a contemporary suspicion of the "totalitarian ideology of the referent" (Barthes, 1970, 138). Furthermore, Fowles's approaches towards a theory of artistic autonomy and a constitutive poetics in *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, respectively, are explicable neither in terms of a suspicious or condemnatory anti-mimetic impulse (since they are concerned to change the grounds of our understanding of literary realism, and of reality itself) nor in terms of a retention of the coherent ego and moral commitment of a liberal tradition, as the more radical aspects of Fowles's reflexive poetics makes manifest.

Moreover, the prising apart of existentialism and reflexivity in my account is an advantage in view of what was identified as the second broad approach to Fowles's reflexive practice, namely, reflexivity as a response to and embodiment of existential principles. It is this perceived co-operation of reflexivity with existential pre-occupations that needs further and more rigorous inspection. Indeed, the existence of *The Aristos*, of Fowles's own prefaces and commentaries on his novels and his numerous interviews have created an "Intentional Fallacy" so pervasive that his work has been explained predominantly in terms of neat critical schemes and metaphors which are unable to cope with possible contradictions, discrepancies and deviations from an existential thematic.[12] As Fawkner accurately contends:

> A perpetuated flaw is derived from the entirely false notion that all Fowlesian statements cohabit a single dimension of discourse: quotes from the novel are forced into a kind of egalitarian rapport with maxims in *The Aristos* or even with "explanations" in letters. When such thresholds of functional relevance are ignored the metaphysical shallowness of interpretations becomes truly stunning. In addition a number of loose concepts are used, each a blurred kernel with an aura of incompatible satellites: "progress", "freedom", "will", "humanity", "selfhood", "time" – chameleon words which tend to twist themselves into contradictory pockets of meaning and which do not really help to clarify anything in analysis. (18)

By examining the points of intersection and divergence between reflexive commentaries and existential themes, I hope to demonstrate that the assumption of an unproblematic hierarchical partnership between them displaces other potential meanings and bypasses the possible contradictions, incoherencies and displacements engendered by this discursive alliance. In *The Collector*, the reflexive commentary and existential thematics unite to produce a powerful 'moral' reading whereby concepts of narrative and con-

cepts of selfhood/authenticity are equated. This, however, conceals a more relativistic position (explicable in Bakhtinian terms) which is aware of the role of language in social orderings, the constitution of identity and the allocation of power. The fictionality of *The Magus* which begins to probe the constructedness of self and world both supports existentialism and comes into conflict with its insistence on a 'real' beyond structuring. Finally, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a postmodern constitutive poetics displaces existentialism as final moral "signified" and co-opts it for its own purposes.

As I will argue, the growing reflexive concern with the constitutive capacity of language in Fowles's novels is diametrically opposed to the relative neglect of the language issue in the version of existentialism he ostensibly follows.[13] While reflexivity and existentialism may share the same dehabitualising urge, expressed in a revolt against traditional, 'commonsense' definitions of reality and (drawing on the reflexive position of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in particular) the repudiation of the sufficiency of any single body of beliefs, they are ultimately based on dissimilar philosophical grounds.[14] While the instrumental view of language held up by the existential discourse allows for a theory of liberal individualism whereby the self (and the writer) can engage with the world and supply it with original meaning, the inquiry into language culminates in the position of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* whereby the subject-in-language finds a world of ready-made meanings. While the "Death of God" (and the break from externally determinate sources of meaning) devolves responsibility onto the existential individual, the progressive deconstructive impulse in Fowles's work proclaims the "Death of Man". The Derridean "presence" of the metaphysical self is dissolved into discourse, disallowing the authority of existential 'morality' and the heightened humanist self-awareness claimed for the reflexive mode.[15] The "careful teasing out of warring forces of signification" (Johnson, qtd. in Culler, 1983a, 213), thus, will be essential to my attempt to trace the gradual pulling apart of discourses in Fowles's work, resulting in the radical displacement operations of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

However, this inquiry does not set out either to denigrate Fowles's considerable achievement or to devalue the useful work of his critics. Its aim is to open up the possibility for further meanings, with the implication that interpretations "explain" but do not "exhaust" (Eco, 59) the potential significances of a work. This approach entails the recognition of the plurality of the text and its "wandering of signification" (Barthes, 1981, 31) by retrieving

meanings that outrun the univocal meaning that the novels (or their critics) insist upon. Since "you cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it" (Eco, 9), I will attempt to extract those elements of Fowles's texts that have been sidestepped in favour of 'existential readings'. This, hopefully, will be a step towards clarifying those "loose concepts" that have led to shallow ethical-humanist criticism of Fowles's work. To expose how texts "self-deconstruct in the very act of constituting [themselves]" (Harari, 38), then, becomes the object of confrontation with Fowles's disjunctive works, as they ironise, deconstruct and undermine those very existential premises held to be the cornerstone of his aesthetic.[16]

V

The decision to sacrifice comprehensiveness and deal with three works only may be motivated on practical, and more academic, grounds. Firstly, the luxury of space within a relatively short project such as this allows for a fuller development of my argument than would be the case if a larger number of texts were dealt with. Secondly, the kind of formal and thematic progression that occurs in Fowles's first three novels makes them a clear and logical site to explore the particular problematic I have identified. Finally, the reappraisal of Fowles's earliest work is in itself logical since it is these works that have become synonymous, more or less, with Fowles's 'existential intentions' to the extent that they are in need of some rescuing or re-estimation. This is particularly pertinent in view of the greater proclivity in the later novels (*Mantissa*, 1982, *A Maggot*, 1985) towards reflexive inquiry and a dimunition in the prominence of a humanist-existential thematic component. A re-examination of the reflexive, theoretical tendencies in the early novels (particularly Fowles's interest in discourse, reality and the self) lays the groundwork for his later autocommentaries and shows that his work cannot be evaluated in terms of humanist concerns alone.

THE COLLECTOR

i

The Collector, Fowles's earliest published novel, barely seems to qualify as a reflexive fiction, lacking both an overt autocommentary and a self-interrogative function.[1] Its typified 'crime story' plot, in which a town clerk wins a fortune on the pools and uses it to kidnap a young art student, places it in the thriller *genre* which early reviewers primarily drew on for explication. Although later commentators have recognised and stressed the novel's more philosophical dimensions – its anatomy of class consciousness and its existential standpoint – few have explicitly identified a reflexive element in the novel. Waugh classifies it as "minimal metafiction" (116), "a form that can be naturalised ultimately to fit realist assumptions" (116). Indeed, Chambers's characterisation of "narrative duplicity whereby the story pretends to be concerned only with its informational content and yet reveals in unobtrusive ways (usually by slight discrepancies) that this is not so" (53) befits and illuminates the covert reflexive mode of *The Collector*. Despite this, an investigation into the fictional assumptions of the novel serves as a valuable springboard to the more overt self-speculations of Fowles's later novels.

An approach to the aesthetic self-contextualisation of *The Collector* may be gained through an allegorical reading of its double narrative structure whereby Clegg and Miranda as 'narrating selves' create first-person 'texts' which serve as a *mise en abyme* of the mode of fiction which the novel claims to be practising.

Indeed, the extreme taciturnity of the reflexive element in *The Collector* may be attributed to its internalisation within a variation of the technique of *mise en abyme* which is defined by Gide as "the repetition within a work 'of the subject of the work' on the level of the characters" (qtd. in Dallenbach, 436). Dallenbach amplifies this definition by explaining the device as "any sign having as its referent a pertinent continuous aspect of the narrative (fiction, texte or narrative code, enunciation [enonciation]) which it represents on the diegetic level" (436). This diegetic duplication functions as a "paraphrasing system...an internal metalanguage" (Hamon, qtd. in Dallenbach, 439) which,

by behaving as a self-provided gloss, furnishes a "critique of the text itself" (Hutcheon, 1984, 55), potentially conditioning readerly reception of the literary work. While *The Collector* may not qualify as *mise en abyme* proper since it does not contain a "nested or embedded representation, occupying a narrative level inferior to that of the primary, diegetic narrative world" (McHale, 124), nonetheless the creation of 'texts' within a text does serve as a "condensed image of the overall design and theme of the narrative" (Jefferson, 197) by throwing light on the novel's own claims for its composition. Drawing on Dallenbach's distinction between "utterance" and "code" models of *mise en abyme*, *The Collector* is able to refer to its narrative situation by " "mirroring " the act of narration (and hence the actors involved and the relationships among them)" and by "mirroring the code of understandings that makes the narration as act a meaningful one" (Chambers, 33). This is done primarily through "figural" means whereby Miranda and Clegg serve, respectively, as " model" and "anti-model" (Chambers, 29) figures so that the narrative situation can define itself in terms of what it is and what it is not.

The novel sets up a direct self-contextualisation via an extensive commentary on art, its nature and role in society, relayed by the protagonists through their respective attitudes towards it. Miranda as 'artist' (and it is significant that she is a promising art student) holds a body of philosophical and ethical ideas about art. These centre on the premise that 'good' art is a repository of moral values, conducive to ethical behaviour and self-improvement. When Clegg admits that he has no "knowledge" about art, Miranda responds: "I knew you didn't. You wouldn't imprison an innocent person if you did" (45). Clegg's shoddy "women's magazine" interior decor, dismissed by Miranda as "bits of suburban fuss" (135), is seen as an extension of his moral philistinism and must be countered by a *praxis* of destruction. This is demonstrated when Miranda smashes Clegg's collection of china ducks:

> 30 bob each and before you could say jack knife she had them off the hooks and bang crash on the hearth. In smithereens. (57)

Art, furthermore, is a site of privileged access to truth. Miranda lectures Clegg about art which is inspired "[b]y passion, by love, by hatred, by truth" (82) and berates him for not reading "books about important things by people who really feel about life" (157). Frustrated by her ignorance and the crudeness of her thinking, she longs for G.P., her mentor, who would "tell me the names of ten books where it's all said much better" (160). In short,

Miranda favours a conception of art which is almost a blueprint for what Schwarz classifies as humanist art (and art criticism), sharing such assumptions as:

> Authors write to express their ideas and emotions; the way humans live and the values for which they live are of fundamental interest to authors and readers; literature expresses insights about human life and responses to human situations and that is the main reason why we read, teach and think about literature. (Schwarz, 4)

Miranda's notion of art is a traditional one, curiously redolent of a Leavisian sense of "Life", suggesting that the decline of civilisation (as embodied in Clegg – the "ordinary man" who is "the curse of civilisation" 137) may be stemmed by serious moral art. Art is, for her, a supremely civilising pursuit, contributing to the development of the mature personality. Thus, she uses it as a moral and aesthetic yardstick to evaluate the world, for example, Clegg's hopeless life is compared with "those Henry Moore drawings of the people in the Tubes during the Blitz" (200) and her unsuccessful attempt to dig an escape tunnel with a "bad drawing" (205). At times, she represents herself as a member of a moral vanguard, a cultural crusader embattled by the vulgarised wasteland of mass society as epitomised by the "New People" with "their cars and their money and their tellies" (218). Hence her declaration: "I belong to a sort of band of people who have to stand against the rest" (219) in order to combat the depredations of banal commercialism. This is enshrined in her attitude to language which is, as Eagleton (writing about Leavis) puts it, "the most telling index of [a society's] personal and social life" (32). She accuses Clegg of "blurring the English language every time [he] open[s] [his] mouth" (72) and even seeks to correct him in the interests of his 'moral improvement':

> When we came down she wanted to sit in the sitting room (I got ticked off for calling it the lounge). (79)

In this light, Miranda's role is reminiscent of the civilising "minority" in an Arnoldian coterie, offering 'culture' (as expressed in literature, poetry, education) as "the alternative to anarchy" (Williams, 123).

In contrast, Clegg's version of art is presented as debased and constricting, as witnessed in his butterfly collection and voyeuristic photography. His "stories" (6) are vaguely titillating daydreams and "novels" are merely items of interior decoration – "to make [the house] look more homely" (22). His inspiration is the corrupted medium of television with its overlay of sexism and violence: "Once I let myself dream I hit her across the face as I saw it

done once by a chap in a telly play" (7), while he emulates a book called *Secrets of the Gestapo* in its hints to "break down" prisoners (44). Indeed, "the word book is often an euphemism for pornography" (Conradi, 33) and art is considered "vaguely immoral" (240). He is immune to the affective qualities of art, as he says of Mozart: "it just sounded like all the rest to me" (51), whereas Miranda enthuses about Bach – "he overwhelms me, he is so *human*" (my emphasis, 250) – and the Goldberg Variations: "such music, such *truth*" (my emphasis, 201).

These attitudes to art are reinforced by a circuit of intertextual citations which critics of *The Collector* have tended to treat in terms of their capacity to "enhance and clarify thematic patterns" (Ben-Porat, 127).

Thus, while several commentators have painstakingly unravelled the structural and thematic implications of the manifold allusions to *The Tempest* in the novel, none has covered them specifically as a self-referring device.[2] As Chambers contends of intertextuality:

> To designate specifically another text or work of art within a text is to invite the reader to correlate that text with the work mentioned... and hence to situate the text in terms of a literary or discursive context that serves as the interpretant, or criterion of relevance, and determines the selective process of reading. (31)

As such, it should be noted that *The Tempest* is a play much preoccupied with the role and nature of art and, like *The Collector*, ultimately sanctions it as a moral impulse. As Kermode writes in his Introduction to the play: "Art ...is the ordination of civility, the control of appetite, the transformation of nature by breeding and learning" (1954, xlviii). Prospero's Art "belongs to the redeemed world of civility and learning" (1954, xli) where Miranda, too, locates her conception of art.

Similarly, while the references to Jane Austen's *Emma* may serve to characterise Miranda whose impulsive desire to 'improve' Clegg (fueled by an air of too easily assumed superiority) and whose process of maturation under the tutelage of an older man of solid virtue is reminiscent of that other well-meaning meddler, they also operate as a miniature 'theory of character'. Miranda's comment "I am Emma Woodhouse" (165) does not so much expose her ontological status as 'character' (or composite of words) as line her up with Emma Woodhouse as "a real human being" (165). Like Emma, Miranda is a viable, carefully delineated ('lifelike') creation whose vitality and vividness qualify her to exist beyond the words that create her.[3] As Emma 'lives'

for Miranda, so too, by implication, can Miranda 'live' for us. This is evident in Miranda's declaration "I am Miranda, and unique" (155) which suggests a 'realist' conception of character whereby proper names are a "form of vivifying, animising, individuating" (Wimsatt and Warren, qtd. in Hutchinson, 79). As Docherty suggests, "the name becomes a locus in the text around which experiences can gather and cohere" so that it acts as "a human attribute rather than merely a meaningful word in the text" (132). This iconic conception of language whereby the signifier coincides with and shares the attributes of its signified is the basis of the humanist aesthetic position of *The Collector*.

In this light, I would disagree with Conradi's reading of the novel:

> In the lengthy disquisitions on the role of the artist in society, as voiced through Miranda, the novel *though it has been claimed for realism*, mounts an eloquent attack on that photographic naturalism which is part of its own project to transcend. (my emphasis, 40)

This is the implication, too, of Eddins's reading which sees *The Collector* as a reaction against the "essentialist author" (vaguely correlative with the realist author) who "imposes a static system of images on the world" (205). I would suggest that *The Collector* pitches itself not so much against any particular paradigm as against fiction that abdicates its moral responsibility. Miranda's reproach of Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and its working class anti-hero stems from its perceived lack of moral perspective owing to its absent authorial stance:[4]

> I think the most disgusting thing of all is that Allan Sillitoe doesn't show that he is disgusted by his young man. (241)

As author, it is his duty to "make it clear" (241) how he stands in relation to his creation, implying that the personal moral vision legitimates art. As G.P. encourages Miranda, his protegé, "if your desire is to go to the limits of yourself then the actual form your art takes doesn't seem important to you" (169). This principle is borne out in the sketch by G.P. that Clegg buys for Miranda (itself an internal mirroring of the nature of art). While it is clumsily executed, it is an expression of "humanity" (209) and the "only living, unique, created thing" (216) in Miranda's world, suggesting that the moral imagination animates and validates form.

As Conradi points out (40), photography (Clegg's hobby) is consistently assailed in the novel: "when you draw something it lives and when you photograph it it dies" (58).[5] However, it is not ultimately mimeticism or

accurate representation that is criticised but Clegg's inability to "translate personality into line or paint" (169), to imbue form with a committed moral vision (as is manifested in his travesty of the vocabulary of art criticism, 122). This is similar to G.P.'s critique of Miranda's art which lacks the depth of personal insight: "you're saying something here about Nicholson and Pasmore. Not about yourself. You're using a camera" (170). Thus, Clegg chooses the 'wrong' sketch of the fruit bowl (64) because he cannot conceive of art as shaped and controlled by an ethical dimension. He objects to Miranda's portrait of him because, to him, art is surface – "a nice likeness" – rather than "inner character" (83). This is opposed to Miranda's 'content-based' expressive view of art, rejecting external criteria like art 'labels': "I felt our whole age was a hoax, a sham. The way people talk and talk about tachism and cubism and this ism and that ism..." (140). G.P. articulates the same philosophy when he suggests that "a picture is like a window straight through to your inmost heart" (170). Art is an embodiment of "the great inner secret" (184), a distillation of the "essences" (140) of life, rather than the "technical accomplishment" about which "critics spiel away" in their meaningless "jargon" (170).

These self-reflections, however, do not amount to an assault on realistic depiction but on art which is content to be merely that. Binns's comment that Fowles effects a "critique of contemporary realist fiction for its absence of moral responsibility" (1973, 319) can be applied readily to *The Collector* in its self-reflexive attempt to reinvigorate fiction with moral substance. As Conradi claims, it is "part of [the novel's] own project" (40) to transcend mere naturalism, pointing to its self-contextualising adoption of a mimetic theory of art that is expressive in its moral orientation.

Thus, philosophical commentary and a system of literary allusion function in partnership to create (through the agency of Miranda's text) a *mise en abyme* of the nature and role of art. Drawing on Dallenbach's definition, the minimal reflexive commentary set up by the dual narrative structure serves as a "sign" whose "referent" is a reflexive speculation about the novel as moral product, about what constitutes "proper books – real books" (157). This is a peculiarly inverted kind of reflexivity since, rather than introducing a note of ontological hesitancy about its operations, *The Collector* draws attention to itself in order to confirm the novel genre (and, by implication, itself) as a moral mode, capable of, and indeed, responsible for, representing an ethically delineated human reality beyond itself. This generates an important paradox

since the expressive view of language held up as a model rests uneasily with the degree of foregrounding and self-questioning implied by a reflexive mode. However, in calling *The Collector* a minimally reflexive work, I am referring to its method of explicitly contextualising itself within a particular theory of art and a conception of the function of narrative. By exploring and creating the criteria for "the magic and importance of art" (141), the novel is able to set up the conditions for its own reading. It remains now to review how this minimal reflexivity *functions* in the novel – in terms of its distribution of meanings and in terms of the novel's critical reception.

iii

Most critical accounts take up the notion of aestheticism in the novel by linking it to the 'practice' of its 'artist' figures, Clegg and Miranda. In so doing, their respective texts become poles of a 'Collector-Creator' dialectic, exemplifying inauthentic and authentic tendencies. The relative distribution of morality and authority to the two accounts occurs mainly through a critical examination of their linguistic and stylistic features. My discussion here will attempt to summarise and pinpoint the salient categories mobilised in setting up the existential dichotomy that prevails in most commentaries on the novel.[6]

Both Miranda and Clegg's accounts take the form of what Bakhtin calls "incorporated genres" which "preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic peculiarities" (321). In structural terms, Clegg's text simultaneously sets up and violates the conventions of a "confession" genre. Through a series of euphemistic prolepses, his narrative reverses the expectations of guilt and repentance associated with the genre and evades the possibility of confession. Thus, before the details of his kidnapping of Miranda become apparent, he coyly refers to her as his "guest" (5), suggests that nothing "nasty" ever happened "until what I'll explain later" (6) and asserts that "It was not my fault" (122), anticipating the revelation of Miranda's ghastly death. Indeed, critics emphasise that euphemism is the "rhetorical figure that characterises Clegg's language" (Conradi, 35) so that it becomes a form of denial – of sexuality and of the reality of his criminal act:

> He refers to Miranda not as his prisoner but as his guest. Death is 'the great beyond', and to murder is 'to put out'. A bikini is a 'Wotcher-mercallit' (when Miranda specifies it, he says "I can't allow talk like that"). "Nice" is a genteelism for

> non-sexual, "garment" for clothes; sex is "the obvious" or "the other thing", naked is "stark", and artistic often means "pornographic". (Conradi, 36)

Clegg's language refuses to engage with reality and, as Loveday points out, there is a "lack of information about the nature of his feelings" (12).

Furthermore, he is a conscientiously consonant narrator who is denied a self-conscious perspective on his actions. This is reinforced syntactically by the plodding, monotonous nature of his prose, combining a predominantly iterative narrative mode with a consistently paratactic structuring:

> Well, every day it was the same: I went down between eight and nine, I got her breakfast, emptied the buckets, sometimes we talked a bit, she gave me any shopping she wanted done (sometimes I stayed at home but I went out most days on account of the fresh vegetables and milk she liked), most mornings I cleaned up the house after I got back from Lewes, then her lunch, then we usually sat and talked for a bit or she played the records I brought back or I sat and watched her draw...(68)

This is compounded by lexical items, his expressions culled from a repertoire of stock phrases: "handed to you on a plate" (25), "like the dickens" (27), "on her high horse" (42), "at sixes and sevens" (68). The triteness of banal, imprecise colloquialism is punctuated by the frequent qualification "as they say", suggesting the derivative flavour of his observations. As such, Clegg uses a "restricted" language code which links him with criminality, 'stupidity' and evil.

Perhaps the most notable difference between the two accounts is Miranda's assumption of a written mode as opposed to Clegg's more dramatic oral mode of narration. Not only does the written mode carry implications of consistency, linearity and clarity missing from a more immediate oral mode but the self-penned nature of Miranda's chronicle suggests a literacy and linguistic facility absent from Clegg's presumably transcribed narrative. Structurally, Miranda's account employs a diary genre, with its attendent assumptions of intimacy and veracity, leading critics to vouch for Miranda's honesty: "The dominant characteristic of Miranda's diary is honesty" (Loveday, 20). The diary, furthermore, is a form allowing for consummate self-consciousness and self-criticism since it is intended for self-communion rather than publication, as witnessed in Miranda's frequent and explicit references to the activity of diary-keeping.

In terms of narrative focus, Miranda's account, unlike Clegg's, is strongly analeptic. While Clegg's narrative is claustrophobically concentrated on the events of the plot which he orchestrates (an example being his extraordinarily long description of Miranda's kidnapping 20 – 30), Miranda's account accelerates events. Her description of the kidnapping is reduced to a paragraph (127) and her long external analepses provide much leeway for reflection about life, feelings, the past, herself: "I've spent most of today thinking. About me" (151). Thus, in narrative terms, Clegg's account is a "crisis", whereby a central event informs and overrides surrounding elements, whereas Miranda's is a "development" in which significances are built up more leisurely (Bal, 40). By implication, we can 'know' Clegg only as he is – "in his narrow, hateful, *present* world" (223) – while we are allowed to see Miranda as she was, is and may become. Clegg is steeped in an unchanging and cyclical present which refuses (moral) progress or change.

Syntactically and lexically, Miranda's narrative differs considerably from Clegg's. Loveday accounts for this in terms of the polar categories "spontaneous/contrived" and "educated/ignorant" (20). Miranda writes things down "as they happen to her", often "in the present or present perfect tense" while Clegg uses the simple past, "the tense of completed, closed, safely bygone and chronicled events" (Loveday, 20). The present tense, of course, also indicates strong modality, a sense that eternal 'verities' are being presented. Her style is 'free', too, in the sense that it is often fragmented and lacking in verbs and conjunctions, becoming almost surreal in its effect:

> I keep on thinking the same thing. If only they knew. If only they knew.
> Share the outrage.
> So now I'm trying to tell it to this pad he bought me this morning. His kindness.
> Calmly. (126)

In terms of diction, her educated status is revealed by the wide-ranging cultural and literary allusions that abound in her prose, while a liberal use of first person pronouns and nouns and verbs of action and emotion – "I love making, I love doing, I love being to the full..." (218), "The only thing that really matters is feeling and living what you believe" (145) – establishes her as a speaker of an "elaborated" code with its promotion of "mobility, individuality and authority" (Fowler, 116). This is confirmed by her use of attributives, modifiers and composite categorising phrases – "That stupid clumsy frightened-of-being-soft English male cruelty" (210), "She had on that special queasy-bright look women like her put on..." (203) – which suggest a capacity

for complex judgements and evaluations. The "elaborated" code also provides enhanced opportunity for wit, irony and abstraction as against the more prosaic and concrete "restricted" mode.

These linguistic, stylistic and structural features are assimilated to a powerful aesthetic/existential reading of the novel. Clegg's stale and clichéd language and his "reliance on untested, generalised, anonymous concepts" (Friedman, 69) allow him to be called, variously, a "failed artist" (Beatty, 79) whose appropriation of Miranda as object exemplifies "his mechanistic, aesthetically deadening impulses" (79), a "poor artist" (Docherty, 120) whose "attempted reification of Miranda...can be equated with the novelist's tyrranous manipulation of character" (120) and a "perverse artist" (Burden, 1980, 36) who "remakes the world in the image of his desire" (36).[7] In existential terms, Clegg as artist embodies the "uncreative accumulation" (Friedman, 69) of second-hand, banal ideas that make him the archetype of the 'collector' figure, defined by Palmer as that which:

> represents all the forces in contemporary society that take away individual freedom or stifle self-expression, that force conformity by placing people and things in arbitrary categories...(36)

Conversely, Miranda is a creator whose 'text' (and life) is "an exercise in creative artistry" (Eddins, 205). By eliminating her own "tendency towards mindless accumulation" (Eddins, 209) she is able to become creative artist and existentialist heroine, open to the "vitalising powers of hazard" (Eddins, 208). Beatty explicitly links this 'existential aesthetic' to her narrative which is "written in a variety of forms, including drama and fairy tales" (80). Thus, " the lack of aesthetic shaping in [Clegg's] narrative is thrown into sharp relief when it is contrasted with Miranda's section, which is an exercise in self-examination" (80). Etter, too, compares Clegg's "alienation from language" (38) with "Miranda's engagement with words, with her attempt to use language both as a creative medium and as an exploratory tool" (38).[8] The existential process and the creative process, thus, merge in the artistic shaping of the self-defined, moral ego.

In structural terms, Clegg's text contains Miranda's, in the sense that it frames it with a preamble and a conclusion and in that she, as narrator of the second narrative, is already a character in the first one and that events in the first narrative, in fact, produce the second narrative. As Loveday observes, "the fact that Clegg's narrative encloses Miranda's is of course highly appropriate to a novel of imprisonment" (14). Furthermore, in accord-

ance with Friedman's claim that "The overall shape of the novel...reflects primarily the philosophical meaning of the events" (41), the insertion of Miranda's diary has been read in aesthetic/existential terms. Giving her a 'voice' "restores her independent existence as a person" (Loveday, 18) and the assertion of "subjecthood" whereby "she tries to break out of her imprisonment and also to escape the metaphysical labelling and reification implied in Clegg's plan for her" (Docherty, 122) becomes the core of the existential/aesthetic 'meaning' of the novel as she textually creates an authentic self. By using narrative as a heuristic device of self-exploration and, finally, self-definition, Miranda as artist is "disidentified from uniformity" (Fawkner, 73), thematising the "predicament of the creative individual threatened by the unthinking crowd" (Etter, 20).

The authority granted to Miranda's account by the conjunction of stylistic features and philosophical themes is confirmed by an appeal to an external source, Fowles's *The Aristos*, which is often held to be the philosophical basis of his fiction. Etter, for example, suggests that the "relationship between *The Aristos* and *The Collector* is a close one" (21) and that Fowles's "intention is the same" (41). Deriving its views from the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus who divided humankind into a moral and intellectual elite (the *aristoi*) and an unreflecting, conformist mass (the *hoi polloi*), *The Aristos* is concerned to define the nature, role and responsibilities of those exemplars of an ideal model of existence.

This division of humankind into "two clearly defined groups, a Few that is excellent and a Many that is despicable, is idiotic" (9) is echoed in Miranda's explicit identification with the Few:

> But this is what I feel these days. That I belong to a sort of band of people who have to stand against all the rest. I don't know who they are – famous men, dead and living who fought for the right things and created and painted in the right way and unfamous people I know who don't lie about things, who try not to be lazy, who try to be human and intelligent ... The Few. (219)

G.P., Miranda's artist friend, is also described as being "one of the Few" (164). As *aristoi*, Miranda and G.P. are "free forces in a world of tied forces" (201), exemplifying the existential creativity of the aesthetic/ethical reading.

Moreover, Miranda's existential conception of God is close to Fowles's version in *The Aristos*. Miranda observes that:

> What I feel now is that God doesn't intervene. He lets us suffer. If you pray for liberty then you may just get relief just

> because you pray, because things happen anyhow which bring you liberty. But God can't hear. There is nothing human like hearing or seeing or helping about Him. I mean perhaps God has created the world and the fundamental laws of matter and evolution. But he can't care about the individuals. He has planned it so some individuals are happy, some sad some lucky, some not. Who is sad, who is not, he doesn't know and he doesn't care. So he doesn't exist, really. (233)

In *The Aristos*, Fowles offers a vestigially Sartrean understanding of God:

> This indifference of the process to the individual objects that constitute it; this God which is a situation and not a person, which does not intervene... all this may appear to leave our human world intolerably bare. (25)

In addition, G.P. refers to "Hazard" (187), one of the key concepts of *The Aristos*, while Miranda uses the sea and raft imagery (199) so prevalent in it (15, 18). Definitions of money, happiness and art also coincide in the philosophical work and the novel.

The close correspondence between the ideas of *The Aristos* and those expressed and 'lived out' by Miranda and G.P. adds considerable weight to the aesthetic/ethical reading, since *The Aristos* acts as yet another intertext to ground and direct readerly perception. Textual (linguistic) codes and an externally validated philosophical thematic, in fact, qualify Miranda's narrative as an embodiment of 'authorial norms'. Davidson, for example, argues that Miranda voices a "judgement with which the author would obviously agree" (30) while Loveday refers to the "moral and didactic weight" (16) of her account. In this light, while Clegg's may be the framing account, Miranda's is the explanatory, 'normative' narrative, functioning as *the* interpretation, reporting her mood swings, defensive strategies and attempts to escape. An obvious example of this is Miranda's attempted seduction of Clegg which marks her moral downfall in his eyes – "I never respected her again" (113) – but which is later definitively recounted as the turning point in her maturation process: "...the last of the Ladymont me. It's dead" (254). In this, she anticipates Julie and Sarah, Fowles's later heroines, who use seductive methods to teach their male counterparts, Nicholas and Charles.

However, Miranda is not simply a representative or embodiment of an implied authorial or narrative perspective (a feature, arguably, of all novels). To return to the notion of *mise en abyme* invoked earlier, Miranda's text serves as a reflexive model of "the ethical basis to Fowles's aesthetic" (Binns, 1973, 320) while Clegg's narrative functions similarly, by negation or litotes. In this light, she is seen to satisfy the requirements of "proper books – real

books" (157), firstly, by serving as the means to 'place' and define Clegg, who is "worse than the Arthur Seaton kind" (242), in accordance with the need for the novelist to spell out a moral stance, and, secondly, by engaging with human reality (Life, Truth) as encapsulated by her own inward journey, with its moral, existential implications. This easy osmosis between art and life finds expression in Miranda's adoption of art as a "mode of interpretation" (Burden, 1980, 157), grounding her situation through literary analogy, in her attempt to tap Clegg's latent moral/emotional being through artistic education/initiation and in her use of narrative as a means of "discovering and stating self" (Burden, 1980, 33). Thus, as consumer and producer of art, Miranda vouches for its moral, expressive capacity and its applicability to 'life'. The humanist art tradition explicitly invoked in Miranda's account by direct and intertextual means is borne out (practiced) by her narrative and, presumably, acts as a wider self-contextualisng force for the novel as a whole. The suggestion that Miranda as surrogate artist articulates the aesthetic theory to which the novel (and, at this point, an implied "John Fowles") subscribes allows her text to function as an univocal source of meaning, morality and values for the work in which it is placed. The minimal reflexivity of the novel, thus, combines with and provides a powerful backbone for its existential moral themes.

iv

Despite the prevalence of humanist/existential readings of the novel, critical accounts have displayed an uneasiness about Miranda's moral stance. Bagchee, for example, objects to "thematic black-versus-white" (219) explications of *The Collector*, as does Neary who suggests that "exclusive concentration on the "Few versus Many" polarity, which assigns to Miranda all of the novel's "potential good" (in Fowles's words) and to Clegg all its "actual evil" obscures some of the book's novelistic richness" (45). Consequently, concerted critical effort has been made to identify congruencies between the two accounts: both Clegg and Miranda have similar atheistic attitudes to God (Bagchee, 222 – 223, Conradi, 38), both have a fetish about dirt (Conradi, 38, Nodelman, 338), both are reticent about bodily functions and disgusted by sexuality (Conradi, 38, Nodelman, 338), both are given to avoiding verbal impropriety by recourse to circumlocution and cliché (Conradi, 38, Neary, 54, Nodelman, 335, Friedman, 44, 57), both are obsessed by beauty and spiritual love (Nodelman, 338) and both are prone to 'collecting' – Clegg's physical pursuit of butterflies (and, later, Miranda herself) being matched by Miran-

da's tendency to collect 'ideas', particularly class 'labels' and existential/aesthetic precepts (Nodelman, 338, Simard, 78, 80).[9]

Commentators have also sought to readjust traditional views of both protagonists by defending Clegg who is "not an ordinary evil character" (Bagchee, 226) and who displays both self-restraint and a touching, if inarticulate, sensibility (Bagchee, 226 – 227). Neary goes so far as to claim that Clegg is the "hero" (48) of the work, reading him as a romantic quester figure – a "metaphysical rebel" – whose kidnapping of Miranda is a "radical existential act" which "attempts to achieve clarity and unity by clearing away a space...for the individual self" (48). Miranda, on the other hand, has suffered a dimunition in critical 'good opinion'. Loveday, for example, whose interpretation is clearly sympathetic to Miranda, calls her diary "an embarrassment, at times" (18) and laments her class analyses which "radiate a singularly unattractive combination of smugness and paranoia" (24). Campbell describes her as "a complex, frequently inconsistent, sometimes irritable, impossibly idealistic, rather snobbish fairweather socialist" (49), while Rackham is probably her most vehement detractor in calling her "a sad, deluded parody of the existential being, mouthing its clichés and praying to a God she has decided does not exist" (92). Bagchee ascribes her "insensitivity" to her "unfeeling assault on [Clegg's] sexual timidity" (225) and sees her to be in the thrall of G.P. whom he dismisses as a shrewdly calculating power-monger (an opinion shared by Nodelman, 346), so much so, that she even appropriates his vocabulary – "her words often display their second-hand origin" (Bagchee, 228 – 231).

My own interest, however, is not to expose the 'defects' of Miranda's character but to explore the rationale behind this critical *volte-face.*[10] The central conflict of the novel, as I see it, is the contradiction between Miranda's role as authorial surrogate, articulating and embodying a humanist/moral theory of art, and the first-person mode which is employed to present her. According to Bakhtin, 'character-narrators' "recommend themselves as specific and limited verbal ideological points of view, belief systems" (313). By its very nature, then, the first-person mode is inclined towards the presentation of the partial, the limited and, by extension, the unreliable. As Simard claims:

> In first-person narration, received information may be unreliable as well as manipulative. One must remember that the novel is simply another manifestation of the personality that experiences the action ... We receive information according to his value systems, so flaws in his powers of perception may

> result in imbalances, misconceptions and misjudgements which are built into the presentation in the novel. (76)

As "bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems" (Bakhtin, 288), the two monologues in the novel induct a sense of Bakhtinian "heteroglossia" or speech diversity whereby "the dialogically-interrelated speech practices operative in a given society at a given moment, wherein the idioms of different classes, races, genders, generations and locales compete for ascendancy" (Stam, 119). As such, the highly subjective narratives of *The Collector* with their carefully exaggerated linguistic and tonal qualities form a dialogical background to each other. These 'languages' mark out different ways of conceptualising social experience, endowing it with meanings and values refracted through a prism of class and gender boundaries.

If Clegg and Miranda occupy the same linguistic community in terms of their national/geographical affiliations, their employment of available discursive options within that community differs widely. As Stam points out, "Each group or class deploys the linguistic/semiotic system in order to shape its own characteristic meaning" (122). In this light, 'Clegg' is a constellation of the "already uttered" (Bakhtin, 279): the languages of profession, gender and class. His stock phrases, for example, clearly demarcate him as a speaker of lower-middle class/working class English while his prim, bureaucratic expressions (the linchpin for exposing his inauthenticity according to the existential/humanist reading invoked earlier) derive from his job as town clerk where mastery of an 'official language' is a professional requirement. Yet another 'language' which fuels Clegg's conceptualisation of self and world is that of the popular media. When Miranda demands to know the reason for her abduction, he "invents" (32) a story that draws from typified movie/television/suspense story plots whereby, as an accomplice of a corrupt bank-manager who forces him to capture young women, he must "obey orders" or face imprisonment for stealing from the bank (32-34). Standing close to Miranda, he thinks that "It was like being in one of those adverts come to life" (89), while the gothic twist in his 'plot' when Miranda dies is compared to a "horror film" (283). A complex of media images and class and gender perceptions underlie Clegg's notions of love and romance. One of his 'dreams' encapsulates the conventionality of his class/gender-based preconceptions:

> That was the day I first gave myself the dream that came true. It began where she was being attacked by a man and I ran up and rescued her. Then somehow I was the man that attacked her, only I didn't hurt her; I captured her and drove her off in the van to a remote house and there I kept her captive in a

> nice way. Gradually she came to know me and like me and the dream grew into one about our living in a nice modern house, married, with kids and everything. (16)

The three 'roles' Clegg projects for himself here – rescuer, attacker and husband – are underwritten by distinct social scripts. Conceiving of Miranda as 'above him', in class terms, Clegg adopts a romance mode through which to conceptualise her. In his opening description of her beautiful hair, for example, he uses formal, courtly language: "Only once..., did I *have the privilege* to see her with it loose" (my emphasis, 5). Not only does this evoke "an archaic, chivalric world, in which a gentleman's regard for a lady would be expressed in admiration from afar, even in awe, for an inaccessible, idealized figure" (Friedman, 45) but it carries implications of privilege based on class lines, a notion reinforced by Clegg's insistence that his "love was *worthy* of her" (my emphasis, 30) and by his self-inscription into romance narratives of valour and rescue ("did things she admired", 6), coloured by 'moviestyle' scenes of 'true love': "In my dreams it was always we looked into each other's eyes one day and then we kissed and nothing was said until after" (37). At the same time, his awareness of his social inferiority in relation to Miranda expresses itself in a desire to wield power over the 'weaker' sex, a view of gender relations promoted and 'naturalised' by television shows depicting male domination through violence (7). Clegg's "bad dreams" (7) place him in the role of aggressor, attacking Miranda, killing her ("I hit and hit", 84) and even violating her sexually, inspired by "an American film I saw once (or was it a magazine) where a man ... took a drunk girl home and undressed her..."(95). It is this role that Clegg literally adopts when he demands that Miranda pose for "pictures" (116). Yet another 'script' that Clegg appropriates is a more or less middle-class conception of marriage, mutuality, materialism and suburban respectability. As the 'husband' in a middle-class marriage narrative, Clegg envisages all the trappings of a conventional lifestyle: a "beautiful modern house" (6) with "famous pictures hanging on the walls" (84), "kids" (16), companionship and mutuality ("working together", 6), social acceptability ("we were the popular host and hostess", 6). Not only does he provide the material basis of this 'dream' by buying and furnishing a house but, later, when he has to buy provisions for the imprisoned Miranda, he remarks that "it was just like having a wife" (51), inscribing himself into a conventionalised role. In so doing, Clegg, in fact, avails himself of Miranda's discourse. She continually anticipates her own future in terms of marriage and children (151) and conceives of marriage as a kind of partnership (with attendant implications of equality and mu-

tuality): "...I've always thought of marriage as a sort of young adventure, two people of the same age setting out *together*, discovering *together*, growing *together*" (my emphasis, 229). She ironically refers to her situation with Clegg as being like "two people who've been married years" (149), pointing to their "almost friendly" (149) periods of silent companionship. The importance of love in this middle-class marriage scenario is anticipated by Clegg when he says, "people only married for love, *especially girls like Miranda*" (my emphasis, 9), once again revealing the class base of his perceptions and definitions. This estimation is amply confirmed by Miranda in the course of her narrative (91, 92, 249). Thus, Clegg's act of kidnapping is constructed at the intersection of three available discursive/narrative models – romance, violent domination, middle-class 'respectable' marriage – which have specific gender/class associations.

While Miranda's narrative is often regarded as a model of creativity and imaginative power, she too is constituted by the "already uttered". The primary register of her language is a rather 'adolescent' enthusiasm and passion, consonant with her middle-class 'girls' school' upbringing: "I love life so passionately" (127). She uses "grisly dormitory stories" (127) as a frame of reference to deal with the horror of the kidnapping and her speech is studded with the youthful catch-phrases of the period: "don't you *dig* this?" (my emphasis, 173), "hero-pash" (152), "lameducking" (147), "unwithit" (171). Like Clegg, her narratives and images are drawn from popular sources. She is equally at home telling "fairytales" (199) or drawing "strip-cartoons" (215), comparing her situation to *The Tempest* or to a "Wild West Film" (219). Anticipating that she will be raped by Clegg, she thinks: "Don't kill me, you can do it again. As if I was *washable. Hard-wearing*" (my emphasis, 130), clearly structuring a self-conception in terms of the language of consumer advertising. The attempted seduction of Clegg appeals to the discourse of commercialised sexuality: "A woman-in-me reaching to a man-in-him" (251). Even her dreams are filtered through common media imagery. A "simple" dream of "walking in the fields" with "someone I liked very much, a man" (259) appropriates the slick 'natural beauty' of any number of advertisements:

> The sun shining on young corn. And suddenly we saw swallows flying low over the corn. I could see their backs gleaming, like dark blue silk. (259)

Another dream about being attacked by a "black horse" (259) on the grounds of her exclusive girls' school, Ladymont, mobilises a typified commercial

image of male virility and power. Her projected love affair with G.P. is figured in terms of a "silly magazine" (245) style romance:

> In these daydreams there isn't much sex, it's just our living together. In rather romantic surroundings. Sea-and-island northern landscapes. White cottages. Sometimes in the Mediterranean. (245)

Film/television plots feed her dream narratives in which she plays the role of G.P's forsaken lover in a drama of "...passion and violence. Jealousy. Despair" (245): "He deceives me, he leaves me, he is brutal and cynical with me" (245).

The recursive male/female images in Miranda's dream narratives demarcate her text as gendered discourse loaded with conventional assumptions about love, sexuality and femininity. As female subject, Miranda is offered a range of male-defined discursive roles. She is cast by G.P. as "princess lointaine" (118), a script that confers power and glamour onto her middle class apprehension that 'good girls' refrain from sexuality (and sexual language), so much so, that she enjoys G.P.'s 'sufferings'at her hands: "I sang on the way home. The romance, the mystery of it" (228). Clegg, ironically, places her in the same role which she readily accepts, her 'unattainability' correlative with her self-acknowledged class-based social superiority. While Miranda's 'romance' self-conception grants her a conventionalised female power, she conceives of sexual relations in terms of a reversal of gender power relations, speaking of 'love' as surrender, submission to an overpowering male force: "I know I have love pent up in me, I shall throw myself away, lose my heart and body and mind and soul to some cad like G.P. Who'll betray me" (245). This typified notion of gender conflict expresses itself in her rape fantasy about the horse, in her projected 'story' of G.P.'s violence and betrayal, as well as in her teasing enactment of the role of "oriental slave" (206) for Clegg. Her third role of middle-class, suburban wife and mother, in fact, neutralises the power conflict inherent in the other two modes by equalising gender relations and legitimating sexuality (thereby, containing its threatening nature).

At this level, the novel juxtaposes two class and gender bound texts which dialogically illuminate each other, as they come into confrontation. The dimensions of class and gender struggle as they are linguistically mediated becomes the central issue, rather than the purely moral arena demarcated by critics. Binn's suggestion that "Miranda ultimately dies because there is simply no *moral* level on which she can communicate with Clegg" (my

emphasis, 1973, 322) can equally be investigated at the level of discursive communication, as the boundary lines of a linguistic battlefield are drawn. The protagonists' awareness that their conflict is a linguistic one is indicated by Clegg who acknowledges Miranda's verbal power over him: "She was very artful at wrapping up what she meant in a lot of words" (111). Miranda, in fact, deliberately employs discourse as a power tactic: "My tongue's my defence with him" (146).

Bakhtin's observation that "Characteristic for the novel as a genre is not the image of a man in his own right, but a man who is precisely the image of a language" (336) can readily be applied to *The Collector*. As Nodelman accurately contends:

> Fowles has created two complex, subtly drawn characters the essence of whose being is an utter lack of individual character. As a result, Miranda and Clegg sum up the conventional values and attitudes of their sexes and their classes, and their story reveals how those values imprison them. (339)

In this light, their differences are less individualised than the existential/aesthetic reading wants to claim. In Bakhtin's words:

> Oppositions between individuals are only surface upheavals of the untamed elements in social heteroglossia. (326)

The dialogical tensions between the two accounts in the novel can be identified and specified in terms of the aberrant textual decodings mutually set up by Miranda and Clegg. Borrowing Eco's terminology, the primary level at which misreading occurs in the novel may be called "Basic Dictionary" (18). A game of charades ends in frustration for Clegg as Miranda's 'words' "enter a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents" (Bakhtin, 276):

> Then we played charades; she acted things, syllables of words, and I had to guess what they were. I wasn't any good at it... (90)

At the level of "intertextual inferences" (Eco, 21), too, Clegg is unable to 'decode' Miranda's text, lacking her cultural encyclopaedia. He responds to an allusion to *The Tempest* with: "...a literary quotation, I think it was" (80) and Miranda has to explain a later reference to "Tantalus" (110). It is at the level of "ideological overcoding" (Eco, 22), however, that the most serious miscoding occurs as Clegg and Miranda 'read' each other in terms of their ideological biases (or what Eco calls "sub-codes", 22). To return to the notions of love/romance/class invoked earlier, Miranda's attempt to seduce Clegg becomes a site of collision of two ideologically overdetermined texts. Her

equation of love with equality means that she cannot offer it to Clegg whom she acknowledges as her inferior – socially, intellectually and morally. Consequently, she resolves to offer him sex, based on a conventional female notion that desire for physical relations underlies male motivation: "He must want me physically" (248). Thus, she prepares to 'give herself' to Clegg in an act of surrender that will reverse the prevailing power structure inherent in her role as object of worship. At the same time, her middle-class script 'intervenes' to provide respectability for her decision: initiating Clegg sexually will be a 'humanising' and equalising rather than a sordid act, with the underlying hope that her relinquishment of her social/linguistic power will be matched by Clegg's surrender of his physical power over her (thereby equalising relations between jailer and captive). However, despite Clegg's acute awareness and resentment of the class barrier between himself and Miranda, he does not seek to neutralise class differences but to rise to her 'level'. His adoption of a 'romance' mode whereby he conceptualises her as the pure and inaccessible princess whom he must reach through spiritual perfection, in fact, relies on and confirms the notion of her social superiority. As such, her attempted seduction with its underlying realignment of class/gender/power relations violates this 'romance' discourse. By "kill[ing] all the romance" (114), she becomes like the "vulgar" (9) women of his own class whom he despises, reflected in his grim resolve to keep her "below in all senses" (118). Finally, he rejects her in linguistic terms: "That's just your language" (118), suggesting her loss of discursive power over him. With Miranda's 'superiority' (power) gone, Clegg's ability to play the roles of adoring worshipper/husband is cancelled out and he resorts to his second script of conventionalised male domination – "I had real reasons to teach her what was what" (119) – leading to the final tragedy. While Clegg laments the demise of the romance mode (and, by extension, his social aspirations), Miranda is struck by the failure of her act to bring about the desired effect of bridging the divide between herself and her socially-inferior kidnapper: "We can't be further apart. We've been naked in front of each other. But we are" (253). At this level, the conflict induced by divergent social scripts can be explained as "the mutual nonunderstanding represented by people who speak in different languages" (Bakhtin, 356).

However, if the "novel is structured as two self-contained, dissimilar, essentially incompatible systems of verbal discourse" (Neary, 54), it by no means presents two unitary and, hence, deterministic 'languages'. As Bakhtin suggests, "language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline

between oneself and the other" (293), implying that ideologies (and discourse) emerge "between the classes" (Macdonell, 34).

That the "single given consciousness participates equally in several languages" (Bakhtin, 368) is borne out in Clegg's struggle to appropriate the language of the 'other'. His recognition that "London's all arranged for the people who can act like public schoolboys" (11) hinges on his linguistic exclusion: "you don't get anywhere if you don't have the manner born and the *right la-di-da voice*" (my emphasis, 11). His "higher aspirations" (12), thus, are bound up with the acquisition of a language that will make him "at least as good as any man" (20). His adoption of a 'romance' mode, in this light, represents an attempt to gain not only Miranda herself but her 'superior' discourse. Commentators have often noted that Clegg's language momentarily moves 'out of register' towards an almost poetic intensity (Bagchee, 227, Neary, 50, 55).[11] Neary, for example, points to his "elegantly simple poetic phrases" (50) and to the "genuinely lyrical quality" (50) of his early descriptions of Miranda's hair: "...it took my breath away, it was so beautiful, like a mermaid" (5) and later, "...It was like a veil or cloud. It would lie like silk strands all untidy and loose but lovely over her shoulders" (69). There is a marked similarity, too, in Clegg and Miranda's accounts of a late night walk in the garden:

> So we went out. It was a funny night, there was a moon behind the cloud, and the cloud was moving, but down below there was hardly any wind. When we came out she spent a few moments just taking deep breaths (66)
>
> A lovely night-walk. There were great reaches of clear sky, no moon, sprinkles of warm white stars everywhere, like milky diamonds. From the west. (193)

Clegg's evocation, which is almost a parody of Miranda's more lyrical, rich and sophisticated account, suggests a consciousness straining towards a language of romance and aesthetic sensibility: "I wish I had words to describe... like a poet would or an artist" (69). This is evident, too, when his manipulation of a romance scenario – "We would be sleeping side by side with the wind and rain outside" (111) – falters and modulates back into his class-based register with the prosaic "or something" (111). From this perspective, Neary's reading of the novel as Clegg's 'quest for self' may be explained on a linguistic level, as he seeks to replace an "uneducated, inarticulate self" (Neary, 53) by inscribing himself within a different discourse (as witnessed when he renames himself "Ferdinand", 40). His projection of an ending for

the tragedy he causes by means of an unexpected literary allusion is often cited as evidence for his tyrannical manipulation of the 'plot' in which he imprisons Miranda:

> We would be buried together like Romeo and Juliet. It would be a real tragedy. Not sordid. (284)

However, it also suggests a last-ditch attempt to enter the romance discourse and gain "some proper respect" (284). Clegg's language, then, is not simply a language of denial (as critics have contended) but a language of desire, reaching towards the discourse of the 'other'. Clegg's 'tragedy', in this sense, is his failure to gain a language. Refused entry into Miranda's discourse, Clegg finally dismisses her "with all her la-di-da ideas" (287) and resolves to continue his grim experiment with "an ordinary common shop girl" (287). By implication, like Dickens's Pip (with whom he is compared, 194), Clegg is made to accomodate to his 'station in life' by accepting his language (or the social position conferred by his language).

Miranda, too, is constructed from an intersection of languages. While family (" a little middle-class doctor's daughter", 155) and school provide her with a language, this 'adolescent' language is partially subsumed by the aesthetic/moral language propagated by G.P., whereby "silly and trivial things" (154) are replaced by a vocabulary resonant of that which is "genuine, and deep and necessary" (154):

> If you are a *real artist*, you give your *whole being* to your *art*. (my emphasis, 153)
> You must *make*, always. You must *act*. (my emphasis, 153)
> You *use* your *life*. (my emphasis, 154)

This language constitutes "internally persuasive discourse" (Bakhtin, 345), "someone else's ideological discourse" which is of "decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness" (345). The extent to which Miranda aspires towards G.P.'s language is indicated by the programmatic list of 'life-principles' which she hopes to assimilate (153 – 154). Indeed, the language of existentialism, which is seen as the zenith of Miranda's growth process, is not necessarily new or a replacement of an earlier language, but a synthesis or integration of the enthusiastic adolescent voice with G.P.'s aestheticism, endowing the middle-class "I" with the serious moral purpose of art.

However, Miranda's process of "ideological becoming" (345) is constantly unfinished, incomplete and contradictory. She tries to replace her 'bourgeois' outlook with G.P's aesthetic imperative:

I don't think of good or bad. Just of beautiful or ugly. (92)

This is especially evident in her denunciation of class which is "primitive and silly" (154), hence belonging to her girls' school discourse. However, despite a vague espousal of socialism and a kind of classlessness – "If you're suburban...you throw away (cauterise) the suburbs. If you are working class, you cauterise the working class in you" (154) – Miranda is unable to dispense with class labels. She claims to "hate people who collect things and classify things and give them a name" (58) yet she is quick to mobilise 'names' in order to classify people. Her mother is a "nasty ambitious middle class bitch" (63), Clegg is the "most perfect specimen of petty bourgeois squareness" (129) and a member of that "horrid copycatting genteel in-between class" (172). Perhaps the supreme example of her classifying instinct (which, ironically, links her with Clegg's language) is the label "New People" which she designates as Clegg's class. For Miranda, 'ugliness' is overwhelmingly equated with the 'lower' classes. The depiction of the masses as "a great universal stodge" (217) which "threatens every vital, creative, decent person" (217) rests uneasily with the declaration that "one must be on the Left. Every decent person I have ever met has been anti Tory" (219), showing that Miranda very much still belongs to a discourse of "the silly ones, the snobbish ones, the would-be debutantes and the daddy's darlings and the horsophiles" (217), despite her declared dismissal of the public school mentality. Like Clegg, Miranda aspires towards a language – a purified 'artistic' discourse divested of class implications – but is held back by her class (and discursive) positioning.

In this light, Clegg and Miranda comprise a patchwork of mutually implicated languages of class and gender, media imagery and the idioms of 'significant others'. *The Collector*, thus, is not simply a sensationalist thriller or a moral cautionary tale but the story of the protagonists' struggle to find a language, a discursive positioning, as they participate in a 'war of discourses'. This "heteroglossia" is repeated on a generic level in the novel as it appropriates the conventions of the thriller, the gothic horror story, the romance, the novel of sociociological analysis and the 'novel of ideas' (existential philosophical novel).

However, it is precisely this sense of 'multi-voicedness' that rests uneasily with the moral/aesthetic position of *The Collector*. The existential, humanist reading, in fact, depends on the notion of the narrating "I" as a "stable sign, product of a complete code whose contents are recurrent" (Barthes, 1970,

141). Miranda as narrator, in this light, generates a coherent discourse which is the basis for her 'authenticity'. The traditional antinomy between self and society also comes into play here for she must wield language in an original way, defining her individuality against social classifications. Her act of self-generation (and self-expression) becomes the source of her 'freedom' and, by extension, the novel's moral stance, as she evades that "naming and collecting [which] stop[s] the essential processes of life" (Grace, 256).

The thrust of the first-person mode of presentation, however, works against the notion of the homogeneous, autonomous "I", defining consciousness as "socio-ideological fact" (Stam, 119). Thus, the existential rejection of 'collector consciousness', defined as "a cumulative calcifying of social and political attitudes" (Eddins, 206) or, in the case of Clegg, the expression of an "imputed, callow, socially bounded self" (Burden, 1980, 37), comes into conflict with a stance that suggests that a "self is constituted by acquiring the ambient languages and discourses of its world" (Stam, 120), becoming the "hybrid sum of institutionalised and discursive practices bearing on family, class, gender, race, generation and locale (120). While Clegg's language is held to be the measure of his 'bad faith' and Miranda's lapses into cliché and triteness are seen to detract from her portrayal as existential heroine, the point is that Clegg and Miranda are neither banal nor heroic but *conventional*, saturated with the preconceived social ideas and discourses consonant with their gender and class positionings.[12] This is evident as they 'narrate' themselves by inscription into shifting, sometimes contradictory, socially validated stories and images. "That Miranda represents nature, or the natural order" (Grace, 257) – a state unsullied by the accretions of society and culture – is rendered dubious by the first-person mode which establishes her as a colloquy of sociocultural discourses.

The inclusion of Miranda's diary which, according to the moral/aesthetic position of the novel, grants her an original voice (self) liberated from Clegg's reifying urge, is also the means for importing "heteroglossia" into the novel, lining up the 'protagonists-in-language' as *relativised* social consciousnesses whose texts deal "in the received ideas of their class and in the platitudes that enshrine them" (Conradi, 35). This relativisation means that, if the sheer criminality of Clegg's actions makes Miranda's discourse the preferable, 'better' one, it is still "equally relative, reified and limited" (Bakhtin, 367), "merely one of many possible ways to hypothesize meaning" (Bakhtin, 370). As Lodge asserts, "As soon as you allow a variety of discourses into a

textual space – vulgar discourses as well as polite ones, vernacular as well as literary, oral as well as written – you establish a resistance...to the dominance of any one discourse" (1990, 22). Miranda's reliability as narrator – the cornerstone of the moral/aesthetic reading – hence becomes a vexed question.

Some commentators (and "Fowles" himself, as the introduction to *The Aristos* indicates, 10) suggest that the revelation of Miranda's 'flaws' and limitations make her more "realistic, credible" (Friedman, 57) and, by implication, more existential since it is a philosophy that deals with 'real', limited and finite human beings and the concrete choices that face them. However, as Nodelman contends, "they also prevent us from trusting her" (335) since Miranda's is a "completely different story" (Nodelman, 336) to Clegg's, freighted with its own ideological biases and, consequently, "no more trustworthy" (336). Since no "Fowlesian voice is explicitly offered as a control" (Simard, 76), we are "faced only with configurations of language" (76), meaning that Miranda's version of herself is by no means definitive. The central problem that arises from this lies in the fact that, as a character, Miranda is burdened with the additional role of *mise en abyme* authorial surrogate, allowing a degree of reflexive commentary normally not found in straightforward first-person narratives where "diegesis is suppressed by the focalization of the narrative through the characters" (Lodge, 1990, 38). In this way, reflexive commentary properly belonging to a diegetic level is displaced onto the mimetic (character) level. Thus, the authority and narrative credibility attendant on her role as author-narrator come into conflict with the partiality and unreliability implicit in her presentation as first-person narrator-character.[13] Rephrased in Bakhtinian terms, the problem becomes one of distance: is Miranda a reflexive mouthpiece closely related to a diegetic/'authorial' perspective, or does the delegation of the narrative task to narrators "with mimetically objectified styles" (Lodge, 1990, 37) effectively shut out the diegetic perspective, leaving the narrators' discourse as the "object of interpretation" (Lodge, 1990, 38) ?

V

It is at the point of conflict between a monological moral voice and the centrifugal pressure of heteroglossia that the reflexive mode of *The Collector* plays its part, sealing up the novel's ruptures by means of a definition of art and language that bolsters a single-voiced reading. The employment of a

"double ironic parody of the fiction of Fowles's own generation of "angry young men" and of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*" (Hutcheon, 1985, 91) proves instructive of the role of minimal reflexivity in setting up a preferred self-reading. *The Collector* clearly pitches itself against the "angry young novel", parodying its working class heroes in Clegg and rejecting its narrative mode in favour of a more overt 'authorial' moral stance. In the case of *The Tempest*, however, if the harmony wrought by art on Prospero's island stands in ironic contrast to the more bleak vision of a modern Welfare State, a "sick new world" (244) where "the book and wand of Shakespeare's magician have been superseded by the magic of money" (Davidson, 28), the parodic relations between *The Tempest* and *The Collector* signal correspondence rather than complete disjunction.[14] Critics have pointed tc the novel's assumption of an "updated" (Binns, 1973, 321) romance situation.[15] Clegg's remote country cottage, with its secret cellar, surrounded by a lush, wild garden is a fitting motif of romance withdrawal and isolation, a realm removed from the social mainstream: "It was two worlds" (19). Edenic undertones (68) and "gothic suspense" (Binns, 1973, 322) are attendant on this self-contained romance scenario. However, the romance mode is not simply a thematic device but a means of 'securing' an interpretative model.[16] At this level, the mythic resonances of the romance mode in the novel are not completely ironised for they allow it to move away from its dialogical tendencies towards a single-voiced self-contextualisation. In so doing, the 'real', sociologically observed dimensions of the novel, encapsulated in its dialectical interplay of languages, are swept away as English society transmutes into a "mythic battle-ground ...in which solitary individuals engage in a conflict for moral and imaginative survival" (Binns, 320). The novel elides its identity as "psycho-pathology of the age and its culture" (Conradi, 33) in favour of an allegorical mode as it "develops into an existentialist parable" (322), "a minor allegory of existence, an extended metaphor" (Rackham, 94). As such, class categories are replaced by aesthetically and philosophically validated ones – "beautiful or ugly" (92), Few and Many, authenticity and inauthenticity – leading to the suggestion that "The element of class conflict is of minor significance in *The Collector* (Rackham, 90). In Jameson's terms, "...real social contradictions...find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm" (79). Bakhtin describes the romance mode as one which "sets itself against the "low", "vulgar" heteroglossia of all areas of life and counterbalances it to its own, specifically idealized, "ennobled discourse" " (384). Thus, the novel's movement onto the level of allegory through its underlying romance situation,

coupled with Miranda's Arnoldian/Leavisian sense that her language is a defence against the vulgar hordes (the existential Many), integrates its monological perspective, creating a resistance to the "polysemous" (Higdon, 1986, 570) implications of its interweaving of "a variety of languages, styles, registers, genres and intertextual citations" (McHale, 166).

The reflexive commentary also serves to smooth over the discrepancies in Miranda's self-presentation. On the one hand, Miranda is an overtly self-conscious narrator, aware of the artificiality of her medium: "there's only the slithery scratch of my pencil on this pad" (174). She admits to her manipulative mobilisation of discourses in the creation of a self: "I'm going to write what I want to say as well as what I did" (142), "you write what you want to hear" (260). Her account is filled with "gaps" (159) and what she writes "isn't natural" (138). She even confesses to 'misrepresenting' Clegg: "He's terribly obsequious, would I do this, would I oblige by...no, he doesn't say oblige" (192). At this level, her self-presentation concurs with her discursive status, reflexively suggesting that her self is, to all intents and purposes, an invention, a construct woven from textual fragments. She is the Barthesian subject/narrator who is "immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it" (Barthes, 1970, 143).

At other times, Miranda's awareness of her narrating activity grants primacy to her "writtenness". In line with the expressive art theory that underlies the novel, the written and the real become correlative. Thus, writing makes Miranda "become very real to herself" (236). When she writes things "the implications shriek" (248). Later, she expressed her outrage at Clegg by "I think it needs writing down" (231) and her despair at the failed seduction by "I've got to put it down" (251). She cannot assess the absurdity of her conversations with Clegg "till I write it down" (192). By implication, then, writing is seen as a means of coping with and engaging with experience, of endowing it with meaning. This 'one to one' relationship between the written and the real allows Miranda's account to evade its status as language and to present itself as a plenitude, a site of fullness. Miranda's diary radiates coherent images which (seemingly) refer to an integrated, original self – an harmonious totality – situated prior to her text.[17] The novel's reflexive commentary with its humanist aesthetic position 'rescues' Miranda's account from its fragmentary, internally inconsistent textual ferment, establishing it as "the expression of an interiority constituted previous to and outside of language" (Barthes, 1970, 141). As such, Miranda is entrenched by reflexive

means as an existential heroine, whose fullness of consciousness grants a figurative 'escape' from the plots of both Clegg and society as a whole.

The reflexive commentary also validates the refusal of Miranda's text to don the "mantle of materiality" (Bakhtin, 239) by excising Clegg's language. His speech is separated out in dialogue form (141, 157, 216) or recast in Miranda's language as if to distance and disown it.[18] Clegg, on the other hand, exhaustively reproduces Miranda's every word in an effort to appropriate her language. While Miranda is aware that "words are all so used, they have been used about so many things and people" (160), the strategy of her account is to purify itself in order to function as a self-acknowledged normative mode, denying that "our speech is filled to overflowing with other people's words" (Bakhtin, 337). To this extent, Clegg is defined as everything which is "not I". This is sustained mainly by linguistic prohibition since language use is the fundamental difference between herself and Clegg, as Miranda sees it, and the basis for her condemnation. What irritates her most about him is "his way of speaking" (172) – "Why do you keep using these stupid words – nasty, nice, proper, right?" (82). His expressions are "suburban...stale" (59). Negative prefixes abound in her characterisations of Clegg:

> His miserable, wet, *unwithit* life... (my emphasis, 159)
> He is so utterly *not withit*... (my emphasis, 171)
> *Un*educated trying to be educated... (my emphasis, 131)
> A Collector who is *anti* - life, *anti* - art *anti* - everything. (my emphasis, 132)

By implication, Miranda stands for the unmarked terms – withit, educated, life, art – constructing herself by separating herself from Clegg's language. She uses language defensively as a means of warding off the contamination of other languages. However, this disassociation from "any sense of the boundedness, the historicity, the social determination and specificity of one's own language" (Bakhtin, 285) is underscored and approved by the romance "enoblement", Arnoldian humanism and existential authenticity, individuality and originality lent to Miranda's discourse by the minimal reflexivity of the novel.

Reflexivity functions, then, not only to buttress the existential position of the novel, but to contain the contradictions and inconsistencies engendered by the use of first-person narrators whose consciousnesses are coloured by a "socially and historically limited linguistic reality" (Bakhtin, 286). While the minimal autocommentary serves to elide a sense of the boundedness of language in favour of Miranda's 'sacrosanct' discourse which is held in place

by a particular definition of the artistic, the irony is that socially-defined linguistic categories underlie Miranda's discursive ascendancy. Critical accounts, after all, judge Clegg and Miranda in linguistic terms and the relative value accorded to their respective texts is loaded with an unconscious social bias that prefers "elaborated" discourse, correlating it with qualities of intelligence, judgement and insight, and granting higher prestige to written forms. While Clegg is credited with the definition of 'plot' (action) and dramatic situation, Miranda controls the possibilities for language and, by implication, insight and moral value-judgements. As such, while the "inadequate and deprived Clegg" may "symbolically reverse the social order by imprisoning the privileged and hapless Miranda" (Conradi, 33), the hierarchical layering of their narratives means that this social order is restored at a diegetic/linguistic level. Miranda's ability to wield a powerful language of classification and evaluation (with which the text, and the majority of critical commentaries, concurs) "marks her as a member of a class of arbiters in our society" (Kress and Hodge, 70). In a sense, then, Miranda is granted a voice at the expense of Clegg whose class-bound text is disvalued and silenced (just as the romance model of *The Tempest* silences the working-class "angry young novel"). Fowles's "Caliban" is deprived of a redemptive language and is, finally, beyond the curative reaches of an Art which is uncomfortably earmarked as a middle-class province:[19]

> I can't stand stupid people like Caliban, with their great deadweight of pettiness and selfishness and meanness of every kind. And the few have to carry it all. The doctors and the teachers and the artists – not that they haven't their traitors but what hope there is, is with them – with us. (217)

Furthermore, Miranda's existential growth, insofar as it occurs, is entirely synchronous with her predominantly middle-class discourse, supported by liberal ideas about personal worth, development and integrity.[20] The chronicle of the progression of a "little middle-class doctor's daughter" (155) culminates in the declaration of a supreme belief in the individual:

> The person I was and would have stayed if this hadn't happened was not the person I now want to be. (261)

In Nodelman's opinion, Miranda's development "merely deepen[s] the conventional attitudes" (344) upon which she acts throughout the novel. Miranda's very ability to construct the persuasive, ostensibly stably realised "I" that privileges her account is premised on the mastery and generation of a particular style of signification. While Clegg's story is equally one of striving for a voice (and, by extension, a self), he is disallowed Miranda's individual-

centred language. His class-bound inability to define the "I" (in accordance with his "restricted" code) condemns him as a narrative 'absence', as opposed to Miranda's 'presence' which allows her the existential moment – and therefore, the moral validity of the novel. However, as Jameson writes, what is projected as a "kind of "wisdom" about personal life and interpersonal relations...[is] in reality the historical and institutional specifics of a determinate type of group solidarity or class cohesion" (59). The novel's attempt to conceal the partiality of Miranda's class/language based moral position may be recovered at the level of a class-based subtext upon which the humanist self-contextualising aesthetic discourse ultimately rests.[21]

vi

Taken as a thriller, the alignment of forces in the novel (good/evil, moral/immoral) is unproblematic. However, since it is concerned with 'weightier' issues, its distribution of meanings is by no account so clear-cut. On a semantic level, its aim to be a philosophical parable of moral import clashes with the sociological impact of its scrutiny of class consciousness. In technical terms, its confusion of diegesis (as vehicle for a reflexive commentary on the nature and moral function of art) with mimesis (whereby characters who amount to style/register/language are responsible for the narrative) leads to the split critical reading of Miranda as authoritative existential signbearer and as limited viewpoint.

In terms of its self-contextualisation within a particular theory of language and literature, its humanist aesthetic position which vouches for the expressive, moral value of art, thereby helping to consolidate and privilege Miranda's account, comes into confrontation with an awareness of the linguistic basis to power, desire, social ordering and identity mediated through two opposed and relativised social languages. As such, *The Collector* contains a complex play of forces that go beyond the univocal perspective supplied by the text and by the majority of its critics.

Having described the minimal reflexive commentary of the novel and critically examined its role in the distribution of meanings, it can be assessed in terms of its similarities to and differences from the more substantial metacommentaries of Fowles's later works. In terms of difference, the novel's unproblematic notion of a smooth relationship between art and life, reliant on humanist conceptions of the expressive, moral function of narrative, is one that is explored, developed and successively qualified in the course of the

novels that follow it. The compatibility of aesthetic and existential positions in *The Collector* also differs from the discord between the more overt, radical reflexive commentaries and the existential standpoints in *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

However, *The Collector* anticipates its successors by embryonically prefiguring the discursive conflicts of the later novels. While its self-situating reflexive frame seeks to ground and contain the novel within its particular definition of the artistic, it cannot hold the untidy contents of "heteroglossia" in check. The novel's suspension between a monological perspective (supported by reflexivity) and the free fall of novelistic polyphony foreshadows (in reverse) the hierarchical wars that occur in varying ways between contesting discourses in the novels which follow.

THE MAGUS

i

Critical response to *The Magus*, Fowles's second published novel, has been remarkably attentive to its reflexive, auto-interrogative dimensions, despite some suspicion of its bewildering, if dazzling, displays of narrative guile.[1] While commentators have complained of its "repetitious" and "fruitless" (Berets, 91) patterns and its "extreme and endless artificiality" (Kennedy, 254), characterised as "mere decoration, formal (and detachable) wrapping for a solid didactic content" (Loveday, 44), the majority of critics have been receptive to the reflexive function of its elaborate plot, supporting the claim that:

> It is by now widely accepted that *The Magus* is a metafiction that is as much an inquiry into the ontological status of its own processes as a novel as it is a depiction of the education of its callous young hero. (Holmes, 1985a 45)

This approach has been encouraged by Fowles's admission in an interview that "*The Magus* was, of course, a deliberately artificial, model-proposing novel, and a good deal more about fiction than any 'real' situation" (Ziegler and Bigsby, 120).

Despite the extensive coverage of *The Magus* as a reflexive fiction, the critical paradigm in which it situates itself has not been specified in any detail. Nor, for that matter, have the interrelations between the existential theme and the aesthetic autocommentary been examined with sufficient care.

As Bradbury so aptly remarks, "The aesthetic problem, the problem of fictions, is in fact created very deep in *The Magus* " (262). Like *The Collector*, its reflexive mode is covert, embedded within a verisimilar tale of the moral regeneration of a selfishly sensual young man named Nicholas Urfe under the aegis of a game of illusionism devised by a mysterious older man, Conchis. While the use of double narration in *The Collector* sets up a limited *mise en abyme* structure, allowing for some degree of commentary on its diegetic intent, *The Magus* expands its reflexive terrain towards a more inclusive self-referring commentary "on its own status as fiction and as language, and

also on its own processes of production and reception" (Hutcheon, 1980, xii), focusing on the complex interactions at work in the classic dichotomies of author/character, reader/text, art/life. This is an enabled by an enlarged *mise en abyme* schema with a wider distribution of reflexive roles. The extravagant Godgame obviously functions as 'art' or the 'novel' while its enigmatic orchestrator, Conchis, acts as authorial surrogate, leaving Nicholas, who both participates in and struggles to make sense of the 'text', to embody the dual roles of character and reader.[2]

In addition, the novel's tripartite structure, gravitating from London to Greece, the locale of the Godgame, and back to London, allows it to create a "model of its relations to the world" (Hussey, 22). Nicholas as "symbolic reader" (22) moves from the "stylised world of art to a world representing reality" (22), permitting ¬ penetrating interplay of art and life. As such, the reflexive method of *The Magus* is to "thematize" (Hutcheon, 1980, 23) its fictional concerns by means of plot allegory, functioning in terms of character and action, and to "actualize" (Hutcheon, 1980, 23) them at the diegetic level in terms of Conchis's stylised baroque plot which draws on detective, fantasy and game models and "directs the reader's attention to the less obvious artificiality of the novel as a whole " (Holmes, 1985b, 349).

The self-reflexive centre of the novel may be taken to be Conchis's disclaimer "The novel is no longer an art form" (96) since "Words are for truth. For facts. Not fiction" (96). This ironic negation of fiction, uttered in the very medium being dismissed, suggests that Fowles's reflexive preoccupation here, as in *The Collector*, is with the nature of truth and the real as they are made available in art. In many ways, *The Magus* seems to be an outgrowth of *The Collector*, taking up its moral and expressive reflexive concerns. Its use of a Grecian landscape and of elements of myth, romance, allegory and mystery, for example, indicate a refusal of the paradigm of provincial realism which is parodied in *The Collector*.[3] Moreover, it ostensibly conceives of art as a curative instrument, leading to improved self-knowledge and ethical commitment. This is displayed in the moral 'processing' of Nicholas Urfe who starts out as a cynical poseur, affecting rakish artistic postures both to lure women and to keep his personal failures at bay. Unable to commit himself to a more meaningful relationship offered by Alison Kelly, a warm-hearted and emotionally generous Australian air-hostess, Nicholas 'escapes' to Greece which becomes the site of further 'inauthenticities' when, upon the

collapse of the illusion that he is a poet, he attempts a "fundamentally aesthetic" (62) suicide – a death in keeping with his stylised life.[4]

Soon after this, he encounters Conchis's Godgame and the rest of the novel is devoted to its effect on his "old self" (49), replacing his vocabulary of the "nemo" with a more optimistic conception of authentic selfhood, freedom and choice in the face of an indifferent universe and a century marked by violent atrocity.[5]

Not only does Conchis cryptically hint at the reformative purpose of his 'text' (95, 99, 110), but Nicholas himself comes to realise that "...there were two elements in his game – one didactic, the other aesthetic" (162). This educative ordeal is scaffolded by a multitude of intertextual references to processes of trial and growth, including quotations from Pound and Eliot which introduce the controlling notions of discovery and self-awareness (69), numerous parallels with Prospero's beneficent illusion-making in *The Tempest*, a reference to the *bildungsroman* tradition of *Great Expectations* (347), allusions to the journey of the "Fool" in the Tarot pack and analogies with various classical and legendary initiates.[6] Thus, Boccia concludes that "we may perceive the Godgame as an educational process which functions through the use of art" (237) with Conchis, the artist figure, acting as "moral teacher to the world" (238). By involving Nicholas in a "kind of psychodrama" (Rubenstein, 331), comprising a series of dramatised events designed as a "test of [his] freedom and self-knowledge..." (Rubenstein, 332), Conchis's "pedagogy...forces Nicholas's life to imitate art" (Palmer, 1974, 45). Art and life do finally merge for Nicholas when, in the trial scenario, he is invited to whip Lily/Julie in a parallel of Conchis's wartime experience where, as mayor of his village, he was commanded to slay three resistance fighters in exchange for the life of his villagers. At this point, Conchis's narrative (art) directs Nicholas's moral action in his choosing not to whip Lily/Julie, allowing 'fiction' to carry over into 'life'. This is further played out in 'real life' back in London when he realises that his future is "all bound up with Alison, with choosing Alison and having to go on choosing Alison every day" (641).

Art, thus, properly functions as a conduit carrying moral directives with applicability to life, promoting ethical awareness and personal growth. Conchis's precepts do not remain "mere principles" (231) for Nicholas, nor, by implication, for the reader of *The Magus*, since the novel involves a chain of reciprocities whereby the 'philosophical lessons' gained from Conchis's novel are transferred via Nicholas to the 'real' readers of Fowles's "heuristic

mill" (10). As Begnal suggests, "...whatever action be taken, clearly Fowles intends that it be action unfolding in the real world, and not in the world of fiction" (71).

While the evidence for this notion of "literature as equipment for living" (Burke, qtd. in Boccia, 238) is plentiful, and seemingly conclusive, its unproblematic extension of the fictive into the 'real world' and its postulation of a traditional art/life antinomy is too simplistic and posits the kind of direct referentiality of fictional 'truth' that *The Magus* works to complicate and redefine. Thus, while *The Magus* allows for this simple art/life valency, it both contains and transcends it.

ii

The central redefinition of the notion of art as a vehicle for truth (as it emerges in *The Collector*) forms the basis of reflexive inquiry in *The Magus*. As Scholes points out, the novel warns against its being taken for a "transcript of reality" (38) when Nicholas explains how "mistaking metaphorical descriptions of complex modes of feeling for straightforward prescriptions of behaviour" (17) led to his absurd youthful impersonation of the literary heroes of French existential novels. By extension, the reader is alerted to the status of *The Magus* (itself an existential novel) as metaphor rather than module of 'correct' moral behaviour. As a self-confessed "metaphor" (166), the novel suggests (via the functioning of the Godgame) that fictional structures cannot be received as propositional knowledge. As internally coherent, self-regulating verbal phenomena governed by their own laws, fictions represent theoretical models of human understanding available only through analysis (as Nicholas's extended encounter with the Godgame reveals).

The Magus, then, shifts its attention from its content to its form, its very constructedness. As Walker observes, "The 'story' is used as a pretext for examining 'storytelling' " (189). The internalised critical context of *The Magus*, thus, lies in a variation (or series of variations) on "autonomy" theories of art, exploring the status and validity of fiction in terms of its non-referential nature or what Harshaw calls its "internal field of reference" (235). The fact that art can make no claims for truth value in the real world becomes the basis for self-reflexivity in *The Magus* and its subseqent examination of the power and viability of fictionality, linking it obliquely to modernist reflexive concerns.

The geographical shift of *The Magus* coincides with its declaration of formal autonomy. Commencing in the banal London of quotidian experience, the novel places Nicholas in "exile from contemporary reality" (56) in Greece where he takes up a teaching post. This prefigures his movement "down and down and down" (63) into Conchis's "domaine" (83). The separation of Bourani from locatable dimensions of time and space is confirmed for Nicholas when he spots a ship in the harbour and muses that:

> ...instead of relating Bourani to the ordinary world, the distant ship seemed only to emphasise its hiddenness, its secrecy. (105)

While the Godgame occurs in time – in terms of both the specificity of Nicholas's temporal location (1953) and Conchis's evocation of past periods, Edwardian England, Nazi-occupied Greece (Fawkner, 56), its ultimate effect is to draw these "external fields of reference" (Harshaw, 243) into itself, conferring on them the atemporality and timelessness of the aesthetic. Thus, the ontological boundaries between fiction and life are demarcated and Nicholas's entry into the "domaine" signals a shift to a self-contained "site for myths" (63). Nicholas moves from "chronos" (Kermode, 1966, 47), time as quotidian successiveness, to "kairos" (Kermode, 1966, 47), time transformed by the significance imposed by the orders of art.[7] This "transcendence" (Fawkner, 108) links art with myth, conceived as a "machine for the suppression of time" (Hawkes, 58), a trans-historical structure which cuts across a "particular and concrete present" (58). Bourani constitutes what Hutcheon calls:

> ...a fictional "other" world, a complete and coherent "heterocosm" created by the fictive referents of the sign. (1980, 7)

While the notion of the otherness of the fictional world has been, as McHale remarks, "among the oldest of the classic ontological themes in poetics" (27), *The Magus* foregrounds its fictionality to the end of announcing its artefactual status. This differs from more traditional conceptions of fictionality where the ontologically differentiated fictional world is held to reflect and simulate the 'real' world. *The Magus* reveals its seams – its internal organisation – in order to refuse a mimetic mirroring act.

Indeed, the compositional dynamic of the Godgame is its disclosure of its artificial 'unreality'. Conchis creates a whole situation, a conceptual world, obedient to its own laws and comprehensible through its foregrounded aesthetic context. "[A]rtful pause[s]" (149) punctuate Conchis's 'realist' narratives, reminding Nicholas "of a novelist before a character" (133). An "air of stage-management, of the planned and rehearsed" (109) underlies the "strange illusionisms" (144) to which Nicholas is exposed to the extent that

"their living reality [becomes] a matter of technique, of realism gained through rehearsal" (127). As such, the process of novel construction becomes implicated in the very act of storytelling. Attuned to this fictional frame of reference, Nicholas's encounter with the first of Conchis's "textual illustrations" – the rotten smell and singing that evoke the atmosphere of World War One trench warfare – provokes the comment that "the events of the night seemed in some way fictional" (135). This undermining of "wished for total illusion" (202) acts as a reminder that the 'referents' of the literary heterocosm are fictive, creating a "self sufficient aesthetic system of internal relations among parts" (Hutcheon, 1980, 88).

The Magus is, thus, emblematic of the creative act of ordering a fictional world, reflexively mirroring the workings of the imagination in Conchis's Godgame. As a paradigm of exemplary order, the Godgame foregrounds the "very act of imagining the [fictional] world, of giving shape to the referents of the words" (Hutcheon, 1980, 76). The "sheer proliferation of narratives" (Walker, 192) in the Godgame (and *The Magus* as a whole) – a veritable pile-up of stories, scenarios, variants, revisions, digressions and *mises en abyme* – directs attention to its condition of constructedness. The Godgame is a dense and complex field of symbols, images, allusions, repetitions, opposing forces and cross references, approximating modernist "spatial form" whereby an "entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity" (Frank, qtd. in Waugh, 23). As such, the novel moves from a metonymic mode (exemplified in the 'realist' framing narrative) to a "metaphoric pole" (Lodge, 1976, 486) where meaning is constructed "primarily through internal verbal relationships" (Waugh, 23). This does not totally subvert narrative chronology, however (Walker, 196). The novel retains the cause and effect relations of the opening *bildungsroman* frame so that Nicholas is impelled towards the fictional 'end' supplied by Conchis's text which is, simultaneously, the furthest point of his journey to understanding. In this way, the Godgame acts as a Kermodean "fictive concord with origins and ends" (Kermode, 20), supplying meaning to "lives and poems" (Kermode, 20). What is true, however, is that Nicholas's chronological journey is mapped out in spatial metaphors, from the *"salle d'attente"* where his journey begins to the underground site of his disintoxication.[8] Furthermore, supra-linear analogical links between the "story proper" and Conchis's embedded stories mean that Nicholas's 'end' (as Magus) coincides with Conchis's 'end' recounted earlier so that the specificity of time and place is cancelled out (Marais, 11).

Conchis's is a world "deliberately, not fortuitously symbolic" (136) where fictive referents are intricately inter-related so that "each detail is irradiated with intention" (Conradi, 57). The patent superfluousness of the plot to which Nicholas is exposed conceals a meticulous design wherein every episode, illusion, allusion, parable or 'character' that Conchis offers Nicholas is an element in a coherent artistic whole.[9] Nicholas's very arrival at Bourani is contrived, as the carefully planted props (a towel, a book with marked pages) and the ready-laid tea-table reveal. The demise of De Deukans's "vast museum" (177), Givray-le-Duc, at the instant of Henrik, the insane Norwegian mystic's, spiritual epiphany is also illustrative of the 'shapeliness' of Conchis's fiction. As he explains to Nicholas, "I am the connection" (311) – as author he creates a cohesive, symbol-laden "predictive form" (Conradi, 58) in which what is ostensibly just "another of his fifty seven varieties of red herring" (342) is, in fact, carefully selected illustration.

Conchis even provides clues to the interpretation of his fiction. A marker in a book leads Nicholas to a passage which explains that "All that happened at Bourani was in the nature of a private masque" (165). Care is taken to focus his attention on the infinitesimal detail of Conchis's *effets de reel*, for example, when Lily/Julie holds out her foot shod in a little buttoned boot so that Nicholas "should not miss this charming period detail" (194). The allusive parallels with *The Tempest* are also "explained" to him by Lily/Julie so that he is appraised of their thematic and symbolic functioning in the 'text'. The significance of Conchis's peremptory demand, "I have found a dead pine. I wish it chopped up" (341) is interpreted for Nicholas by Lily/Julie so that "every stroke" he takes "is symbolic" (294) of the educative purpose of Conchis's enchantments and the role alloted to him in them: "I recalled the parallels with *The Tempest*, and that old man's trial of the young usurper in his domaine" (383). This habit of internal explanation is repeated on a larger scale where Fowles provides glosses on the more obscure references in the novel (the ka sign, the Goddess Io) for his readers.

The novel's status as "alternative imaginative order" (Binns, 1973, 328) places ordering and sense-making at the heart of the transaction between text and reader. In fact, the novel is structured upon a "profane" (Rubenstein, 329) mystery mode which draws attention to the hermeneutic unravelling of 'meaning' that is the basis of all reading. However, Conchis's wily text which plants and withdraws the clues to its 'mystery' is based on a detective story

model which is ironically instructive of how *not* to read. As Nicholas remarks of his attempts to reconstruct the meaning of the events at Bourani:

> By searching so fanatically I was making a detective story out of the summer's events. (552)

To view the Godgame as "something that could be deduced, hunted and arrested" (552) is a cardinal error in a novel that adheres to the Ricardian notion of the "pseudo statements of art" (512) which are immeasurable by standards of verifiability or conformity to external reality. Begnal notes that "A reader must read in terms of metaphor and archetype, rather than in terms of empirical fact" (68).

This is an apt indication of Nicholas's readerly role since the "heterocosm is not necessarily to be judged by its relationship to extra-linguistic, extra-literary reality" (Hutcheon, 1980, 90). According to Hutcheon, truth is irrelevant to fiction – a "heterocosm" is judged in terms of "inner motivation and validity" (1980, 90). Referentiality is contained within the fictional universe:

> ...for readers the meaning of each word increasingly takes its context from other words in that same work; the locus of reference gradually changes from the reader's linguistic, literary and existential experience in general to include their experience of that text in particular. (Hutcheon, 1980, 98)

Since new meaning is created by the deployment of a specially constructed aesthetic context, it is the reader's job to interpret textual units in terms of this figurative whole. As Olson notes, "The assumption of aesthetic purpose guides the reconstruction of the analogy" (50).

If the reflexive position sketched earlier suggests that Nicholas abuses fiction by failing to connect the aesthetic with the moral, his deficiency here is his 'literalisation' of art, believing that it is a "vehicle for experiences that exist and/or can be made to exist in [his] world" (Hutcheon, 1980, 94). His habit of converting literature into concrete knowledge is perpetuated in his encounter with Conchis's Godgame.[10] Like Emma Bovary, he reads Conchis's world as 'real', projecting himself literally into a tangible love affair with Lily/Julie. His sexual pursuit of her enacts a desire to 'possess' the referent, ignoring her fictive status. By making his text "come alive", literalising it in a series of ultra-realistic dramatised scenarios, Conchis blurs the difference between fictive and literal referents. Finally, the bewildered Nicholas learns that he can only orient himself in Conchis's world by accepting and reading it as an imaginative construct.

Thus, Nicholas's extra-literary inquiries into Lily/Julie's background amount to nothing since her 'reality' derives from the text in which she is constructed. The same is true of his investigations of some of the fantastically inexplicable events at Bourani which gain validity and logic only by their placement within a totalized fictional structure. The pursuit of the 'real' Conchis, similarly, can lead only to a "false grave" (559). The case of De Deukans, the subject of one of Conchis's grand narratives, is illustrative of this preferred mode of reading since he is granted "some truth by analogy, perhaps, but far less than a literal one" (192). As Nicholas correctly observes of the 'coincidental' conflagration at Givray-le-Duc at the moment of Henrik's encounter with his "pillar of fire" (309): "I sensed that the coincidence was not literally true, but something he had invented, which held another, metaphorical, meaning; that the two episodes were linked in significance, that we were to use both to interpret him" (311). The Godgame teaches Nicholas to read relationally, to seek out internalised, co-related patterns. As reader, it is Nicholas's "powers of unbelief" (227) that are ultimately "assayed" (227), requiring him to suspend a literal belief in operative referents in favour of a response to the metaphoric functioning of fiction. Conchis encourages him to "pretend to believe" (137), that is, to recognise his art-world as imaginary (non-referential) yet to continue to participate in its "concretization". Nicholas is "forced to acknowledge his active creative role" (Hutcheon, 1980, 41) in activating the latent imaginary universe which depends on readerly activity. For this reason, he cannot take up a position as a "spectator", "letting these increasingly weird incidents flow past" (184). Reading is an "active, creative and demanding process" (Hutcheon, 1980, 98), asking him to:

> follow the arrangement of parts, to observe the formal construction, to synthesize the dialectic of opposing forces, to explicate the symbolism... (Creighton, 217)

Conchis's mutable plot often defeats Nicholas, so that he calls it an "elaborate joke" (134), an "obscure poem, doubly obscure in why it had ever been written" (192) and compares himself to "a mouse before a cat" (234) and a "man in a myth incapable of understanding it" (381). However, as a reader whose role is one of active collaboration with the text in the act of sense-making, he is a "rat granted a sort of parity with the experimenter" (478), suggesting that understanding a metaphor is as much a creative endeavour as making a metaphor.

The qualifier "sort of" in Nicholas's apprehension of his position *vis-à-vis* Conchis's text and his constant use of metaphors suggesting asymmetrical

power relations are apt, however.[11] If *The Magus*, in part, suggests that the reader/text relationship is an active cooperation in negotiating a piece of language, it is also mediated by a dialectical struggle for 'mastery.' From this conflict, it is the text (in keeping with theories of artistic autonomy) that emerges victorious. While *The Magus* reflexively foregrounds the creative processes that build the fictional world, that world is experienced as a finely wrought and exactingly plotted product. There is no sense that Conchis as author invents 'as he goes along', thereby directing attention away from the 'raw material' to the completed fictional construct which is already 'in place'. As Fleishman remarks:

> Conchis is concerned to create a set of theatrical forms, coyly alluding to their artificiality but at the same time making them highly finished and refined. (312)

This is similar to Nicholas's perception of the 'Greek Resistance' episode: "This scene was so well organised, so elaborate. I fell under the spell of Conchis the magician again" (376). Conchis is a seasoned storyteller, an 'old hand' at arranging the Godgame which is an annual rite. *The Magus*, in this light, serves as a comment on the inherent seductiveness, power and authority of novel form; Conchis, like Fowles, has a "splendid and seductive narrative drive" (Conradi, 53). While many commentators point to Nicholas's "rational scepticism" (Burden, 1980, 172) in encounter with Conchis's mysteries, a quality that, in fact, serves to keep the fantasy world within the bounds of the credible, it is equally true that, for all his scepticism, Nicholas is unable to resist Conchis's alluring text. This is attested to in his admiring submission to Conchis's fabulously convoluted plot: "I had that headlong, fabulous and ancient sense of having entered a legendary maze; of being infinitely privileged" (210). His moment of surrender to Conchis's art-world: "...let it all come, even the Black Minotaur, so long as it came" (322) prefigures his eventual resentment of Conchis: "Not that he had done what he did, but that he had stopped doing it" (553). Binns extends this to the reader of *The Magus*:

> A problem ...for the reader is that the narrative structure of tension and anti-climax becomes so seductive that it invariably causes withdrawal symptoms when the ultimate reductive anti-climax is reached. (1973, 337)

The paradox that comes into play here is that despite the novel's admission of its deceptive trickery (its unreal status), it does not produce a distancing effect which "prevents the reader from becoming vicariously involved in the narrated events" (Marais, 33).[12] Indeed, Conchis's novel maintains a palp-

able hold (and, somehow, increases its hold) over Nicholas, the "eternal deception-relishing child" (346). If Nicholas acknowledges the fictiveness of Conchis's enterprise: "I was reminded of that great dramatic skill, the art of timing one's suprises" (211), he concedes that "I still fell for it, as one still falls for the oldest literary devices in the right hand and contexts" (139).[13] While the oscillation between real and fictive in Conchis's world (which simultaneously 'is' and 'is not') produces feelings of anxiety and disturbance in Nicholas, this "conceptual puzzle" (Apter, 66) also arouses a tension experienced as pleasure and excitement, a feature typical of metaphor (Apter, 66 – 70).

The power granted to fictionality is reinforced by the technical arrangement of narrative levels in the novel. Conchis's embedded narratives are, logically speaking, diegetically inferior to Nicholas's first-person narrative. In fact, much of what has been described as the coherent art-world emerges only from Nicholas's description of it, although Conchis's four interpolated narratives (World War One, De Deukans, Henrik the Norwegian mystic and World War Two and the Greek Resistance) are recounted by him and recorded 'in his own words'. However, section two of the novel marks the disappearance of Nicholas the retrospective narrator, who, in section one, comments on the follies of his youthful self, and a transition to that youthful, consonant, 'experiencing' self. This narrative turnabout explains the balance of power that Conchis's text accrues to itself, for Nicholas assumes the position of ignorant reader continually baffled by the fictions which the omnisciently authorial Conchis weaves. Paradoxically, the very qualities that make Nicholas an unreliable narrator according to the revisionary retrospective voice – his scepticism and ignorance – make him a reliable witness to Conchis's mysteries, for he reports only what he sees and understands, administered by a limited consciousness. Thus, he is reduced in narrative stature and Conchis, who is really a character and part-time first-person narrator, is granted honorary third-person status, allowing his world both coherence and cogency. As Palmer observes, he is both "omniscient narrator (relating the stories of the past)" and "dramatist (choreographing the scenes of the masque)" (1974, 18).

The image of Nicholas as caught up in Conchis's "script" (322) also enables a metacommentary on the nature of character. From the start, Nicholas perceives that he fulfills a 'function' in Conchis's grand design as a "potential employee" (84) in whom Conchis expresses interest so that he can "use [him]

in some way" (102). The sustained theatrical analogies in the novel are also revealing of Nicholas's 'role': after watching Conchis's Apollo masque, he comments that "sooner or later I was going to be asked to perform as well" (169), lured by the delectable Lily/Julie, he expresses an eagerness to "play my part" (169) and, later, angered by the withdrawal of the masque, he concludes "I had been a mere side-plot" (386). Towards the end of the novel, he expresses gratitude to Conchis "for giving me the part he did" (577).

While moral/aesthetic readings of *The Magus* treat Nicholas as the liberal-humanist developing character announced by the opening *bildungsroman* frame, his status as textual sign is implicit in the novel's metacommentary which covertly recognises that "Characters in fiction are, of course, literally signs on a page before they are anything else" (Waugh, 56). The dramaturgical analogies attendant on Nicholas's participation in the Godgame are apt for they draw attention to his status as actantial unit, a phonemic component in a structural design operating on the "level of function rather than content" (Propp, qtd. in Hawkes, 89). Nicholas is the "Subject" (Greimas, qtd. in Hawkes, 91), or 'hero', of Conchis's narrative whose sphere of action is defined by its underlying "performative" (Greimas, qtd. in Hawkes, 94) structure, "involving trials, struggles, the performance of tasks" (94).

This is true, too, of Lily/Julie who is literally constructed 'before our eyes' (and Nicholas's) by Conchis when he announces: "...this evening I give you not a narrative. But a character" (170). Thus, she performs to his prescriptions; as Nicholas remarks of her period costumes, "She was in fancy dress for him..." (156). When she lectures Nicholas about God, he observes that "she was saying what Conchis wanted" (295). The fact that Lily/Julie "transparently" (468) plays roles is compounded by the presence of Rose/June, her twin sister, who produces "Doppelgänger effects" (201), thereby attenuating the discreteness of individuated character. As Walker observes, characters in *The Magus* "seem to derive their existence less from notions of individual psychology and realistic presence than from [the] interweaving within the text itself of metaphors, myths and symbols..." (194). The multiple roles Lily/Julie is alloted in the Godgame (Conchis's fianceé, actress, mental patient, psychologist) correlate with names that designate them – Lily Montgomery, Julie Holmes, Vanessa Maxwell – undermining the iconic and stabilising use of the proper name in fiction as an indicator of individual and knowable persons. As Burden points out, "The monopolisation of the proper name has traditionally contributed to the unity of identity" (1980, 9). How-

ever, Lily/Julie's names are empty signs, a "series of points in the graph of Nicholas's experiences" (Docherty, 132). As Marais accurately contends, the identities of Lily/Julie and Rose/June "modulate according to the demands of the masque and are consequently never stabilised" (18). Nicholas's bewildered conclusion: "Julie Holmes was no more her real self than Lily Montgomery had been" (283) is uncannily accurate since Lily/Julie has no essential or locatable core of self. Even her final identity as Lily de Seitas (revealed by her mother back in England) cannot be definitive. She is so textually dispersed that she too can only be interpreted as metaphor or archetype, formally bound to the novel's profuse patternings and signifiying 'character' rather than 'person'.

The onomastic use of naming in *The Magus* is the clue to the allusive functioning of characters in the Godgame. As commentators severally point out, the name combinations Lily/Rose and Julie/June tie up with Tarot lore (accomplices of the Magus) and with the months when the Godgame is performed. The convenient availability of the puns "conscious" and "earth" in the names Conchis and Urfe also hints at their respective roles of enlightenment/authorial omniscience and Adamic Everyman undergoing initiation.[14]

Besides punning and allusion, the names of the three principals, Conchis, Nicholas and Alison, are intricately inter-embedded to produce a chinese box effect. The name Nicholas, in fact, has the potential to spell all three, containing the name Conchis, leaving the letters al, and the name Alison, leaving the letters ch. The cryptical imbrication of these names suggests that Conchis and Alison function as Nicholas's 'potentia', representing aspects of his intellectual and emotional being yet to be realised. A cross word puzzle clue – "All mixed up, but the better part of Nicholas" (252) – confirms this, formally positioning Nicholas and Alison in relation to each other. Thus, even Alison who is juxtaposed with Lily/Julie in a life/art dualism is ultimately "cast as Reality" (647), playing out a fictional function in Conchis's – and Fowles's – verbal design. This textuality is echoed on the plot level when Alison becomes co-opted into Conchis's art-world, her "true death" (493) nothing but a fiction.[15]

The Magus may also be taken as a metastatement on the authorial role. Following Fowles's oft-quoted remark in the Foreword that "I did intend Conchis to exhibit a series of masks representing human notions of God" (10), Conchis as author has been identified with a display of power, authority and

virtuoso skill.[16] As testimony to these qualities, Nicholas calls him "master of his domaine" (88), a "director" (170), a "chess master" (221), the "man at web centre" (511), possessed of a "haunting, brooding omnipresence" (386) and a "smile of dramatic irony" (147), hinting at "privileged information" (147). However, there has been a critical tendency to anthropomorphise Conchis to a fault. This stems from his ambivalent status in the novel, for, if he occupies the reflexive role of story teller, he is still logically (if minimally) a character in Nicholas's narrative. While he is supplied with a detailed 'realist' life story (related by himself), its positioning within a context clearly demarcated as art, serving as the material for the Godgame, disallows it as the means to ground him as humanised and fully individuated character. Like Lily/Julie, he refuses to cohere as a character and we are made aware of his fictional construction. His demeanour, upon relating his life experiences, is "much more that of a novelist before a character" (133). He creates 'himself' in the process of telling so that his 'confession' is "more like biography than autobiography" (133). Thus, Rubenstein suggests that "[Conchis's] function on the realistic level remains unclear" (335).

A possible solution to this may be to read Conchis on a reflexive level and to emphasise the obviously allegorical dimensions of his functioning within the novel. Nicholas perceives his "mask-like" (99) quality and finds him "not quite human" (79). The Poseidon statue serves as an appropriate incarnation for Conchis: "...this still figure, benign, all powerful, yet unable to intervene or speak; able simply to be and to constitute" (211). He is a deliberately enigmatic, 'silenced' force in the novel so that he may assume a powerful reflexive role as transcendental imagination or consciousness, imperceptibly performing the creative act. If the modernist credo was "Exit Author", *The Magus* restores the authorial voice as "psychological presence, devoid of personal characteristics or idiosyncrasies" (Creighton, 217). The mind is, thus, revealed as "itself the basis of an aesthetic" (Waugh, 24) and the author as "finally authenticated demiurge fantasticating in his void" (Conradi, 56).

The self-referential 'fictionalisation' of every component of the novelistic universe is completed by the interruption of a "metalepsis" or "violation of the hierarchy of narrative levels" (McHale, 119) at the beginning of chapter seventy-eight, where an alien voice intrudes and discusses the fictional fate of Nicholas, now an "anti hero" (645) in a third-person plot. This shift from first-person to third-person narration (the only overt moment of diegetic reflexivity in *The Magus*), displacing the narrative to a higher level, signals

the entry of "Fowles" himself (or an omniscient stand-in). In this way, the novel initiates a series of collapses: Nicholas, as first-person narrator, succumbs to Conchis's plot, which, despite its logical inferiority, is granted partial narrative authority. This authority, in turn, is subsumed by a higher authority – Fowles's plot – to which Nicholas, and Conchis, ultimately belong. Thus, final textual authority is reversed from the outermost narrator, Nicholas, whose retrospective *bildungsroman* perspective seems to allow him narrative credibility, to an interim narrator, Conchis, whose text is authorised reflexively, to the innermost narrator, the omniscient "Fowles" who secretly generates the entire novel. What remains, finally, is the God-like mind of the 'behind-the-scenes' author which is revealed as a "perfect aestheticizing instrument" (Waugh, 24). We are reminded that the explicitly artificial connections of plot in the novel fit in with the larger designs of the author playing God, suggesting that "pure contingency in novels is always an illusion" (Waugh, 18).

iii

Having sketched the dominant reflexive position in *The Magus*, it remains to connect the status of art with "actual states of reality" (Siegle, 3) by examining its epistemological and ontological affinities. Most commentators treat the Godgame as a model of reality, offering Nicholas a series of contrived situations which approximate his life experiences and teach him sundry 'lessons' about war, patriotism, love, responsibility, knowledge and action.[17] Thus, the Godgame is a stage toward authenticity which must be realised, ultimately, in life rather than art. McDaniel representatively contends that the Godgame is "finally undermined to leave the protagonist alone, free of artifice and control, and staring into the face of life's real competitions" (1985, 38), an opinion echoed by Scholes: "By involving Nicholas in a situation in which art and life are really and deliberately confused for an ethical purpose, Conchis succeeds in making Nicholas ultimately hungry for reality" (40).[18]

However, *The Magus* is not only concerned with the process of instilling a particular (existential) meaning in Nicholas, granting metaphor the instrumental function of helping to reveal 'what is', but with the very act of *making meaning*. As such, it investigates the *cognitive* functioning of artistic metaphor as a means of conceptualising and giving meaning to the world.

The cognitive, epistemological functioning of the Godgame becomes apparent through the novel's deployment of what Conradi calls an "aporetic backwash or leakage" (52) whereby Conchis's art-world spills over into the London earlier depicted as real. While Nicholas's trial and disintoxication presumably free him from Conchis's plot in order to work out his existential destiny, the irony is that the vast machinery of the Godgame is not "dismantled" (442).

Nicholas's investigation at the deserted Bourani leads him into the underground shelter known as the "Earth" where he discovers some of the props and raw materials of the Godgame, including costumes, books, a set of "orders" (548) to Lily/Julie and the other members of Conchis's 'cast' and the magician fable (550 – 552). While these appear to be left behind casually after the dissolution of the Godgame, underscoring its artificial nature, they are in fact deliberately planted. Nicholas observes that "The orders looked suspiciously as if they had all been typed out at the same time...as if they had been written *ad hoc* at one sitting" (552) and that "The poems and the little epistemological fable were easier to understand; had clear applications" (552). He is at this point clearly still 'in the Godgame'. The Godgame also extends beyond the "domaine" into the village in Greece and, finally, to London where surrounded by "*deliberate* silence and absence" (my emphasis, 577), Nicholas pursues the "trail of Conchis and Lily" (577).[19] Thus, Nicholas is kept "in the masque" (577) in a realm equally ruled over by Conchis's "connivance" (631). The 'fortuitous' unearthing of Mrs de Seitas, a shadowy Miss Havisham figure and the 'key' to the Godgame's mystery, in the eponymously named "Much Hadham" (585) transforms the mimetically observed, 'real' London of the opening narrative into an arena of Nabokovian formal play, as Nicholas, once again, finds coincidences, contrivances and intricate patterns.

The final encounter between Nicholas and Alison in Regent's Park has been read as the site of his exit from the Godgame – the "metaplay ends and life begins" (Palmer, 1974, 64). Surrounded by a "row of statues of classical gods" (652) – a vision of art reduced to its immobile and artificial status against the fluidity of life – Nicholas asserts that "There were no watching eyes... The theatre was empty" (654). Amidst "fragments of freedom, hazard" (656), he slaps Alison to 'disintoxicate' her so that she, too, can exercise authentic choice outside of the bounds of art. However, it is questionable whether art finally disappears in *The Magus* to be replaced by a revitalised and revitalising reality. After all, Nicholas qualifies his confidence in the dissolution

of the Godgame: "I was so sure, and yet...after so much, how could I be perfectly sure" (655). As the "perfect climax to the Godgame" (655), the final encounter is equally a plot, engineered by Conchis, in which even Kemp, Nicholas's stolid landlady, participates. It is Alison now, rather than Lily/Julie, who carries out Conchis's instructions and 'roles', adopting his habit of terse, enigmatic utterance: "It was not a difficult part to play: that bruised face, very near tears, but not in tears" (652). Moreover, at this point, the imagery, symbols and episodes of the Godgame draw together.

The effect of this aporia, combined with the novel's metalepsis may serve as a reminder that fiction is not a 'mirror of reality'. The realistically depicted London of the opening narrative is every bit as much a fictional construct as Conchis's fantasy world. Furthermore, it insists on the logical irony that Nicholas as character is to the end contained in a plot – that of Conchis and of the presiding author, "Fowles".

However, since reflexive fiction turns outwards to examine its relations to the world, the intermingling of art and what is purportedly designated as 'life' engendered by the aporia proves instructive of the cognitive role of fictions.[20] Since the constructs woven by the human consciousness make reality available, giving it sequence, pattern and meaning, Nicholas remains 'in the Godgame' which serves as a "permanent structure into which individual human acts, perceptions, stances fit, and from which they derive their final nature" (Hawkes, 18). As a tool for the discernment of the real, the Godgame provides Nicholas with a mode of vision, a 'way of knowing' the world, replacing his "wrong kind of sight" (173). It is literally a 'fiction to live by'. What the Godgame ultimately teaches Nicholas, then, is how meaning is made. Since our relation to reality is not positive knowledge but a hermeneutic construct, he learns to 'read' his world relationally, ordering referents into a cohesive structure like that of literary fiction. In so doing, he implicitly realises the import of the magician fable which, drawing on the notion that death is the ultimate and only reality, suggests that human constructs are Kermodean "shapes which console the dying generations" (Kermode, 3), providing meaning in the face of brute contingency. Unlike *The Collector* where transparent fictions may be applied to life, *The Magus* explores art as an interpretative construct which supplies knowledge, meaning and order.

By appealing to a concept of 'life', recuperative critical commentaries 'explain away' the aporetic spillover of the fictive into the space defined as reality.

Holmes's claim that:

> ...behind life's apparent simplicities lurk complexity and ambiguity. Behind the known reality is mystery and artifice... (1985a, 53)

is typical of the critical attempt to deal with this countermovement, as is Rubenstein's assertion that "...mystery is the underside of ordinary experience" (331). While these assertions have a certain point, they cannot explain why the frame between the real and the fictive (as they are designated in *The Magus*) dissolves.[21] As a story that reflexively invents an imaginary world which, subsequently, becomes *the* world, *The Magus* implies that "human beings can only ever achieve a metaphor for reality, another layer of interpretation" (Waugh, 15). Fowles himself has noted that "One cannot describe reality; only give metaphors that indicate it" (1977, 139), a point corroborated fictionally by Mrs de Seitas who asserts that "in reality, all is fiction" (625) and by the magician fable which asserts that "There is no truth beyond magic" (552).

However, if the world itself is a colloquy of fictions, art is a "Supreme Fiction". This suggests a particular ontological position, since as "alternative worlds", autonomous linguistic entities, literary fictions are not simply a "way of viewing reality but a reality in [their] own right" (Hutcheon, 1980, 90). This subscription to the 'Doctrine of the Imagination' implies that while the ordering act is basic to human nature and, hence, life, art is an exemplary ordering. The ending of *The Magus* presents a world literally swallowed by textuality where the inner world of art (the Godgame) has been substituted for the outer frame designated as reality.[22] Art is, thus, seen as a replacement for the everyday world, contesting its representations. Precisely because literary fiction is non-referential, it represents the liberation of the imagination from "the bondage of empirical fact" (Hutcheon, 1980, 77).[23] The ability of the Godgame to effect *ostranenie*, to counteract the routine and habitualised constitution of reality engendered by everyday fictions, frees Nicholas from enslavement to the empirical, as it is defined by "the past,...objective reality,...the commonly understood limits of everyday forms of perception" (Graff, 394).

After all, Conchis's Godgame thrives on the "reality of unreality" (279), "improvising" imaginative "realities more real than reality" (338) which is revealed as "dispensable" (202). In presenting his spectacle about the complexity of human truths (231), he rejects "too much insistence on the truth" (226) in favour of realities that are "unverifiable" (235). By playing on the

novel's identity as a lie, the Godgame fêtes fictiveness, establishing the preferred status of the unreal.[24] Indeed, fiction assumes a higher reality since "Every truth in [Conchis's] world was a sort of lie; and every lie a sort of truth" (294) – the fictive becomes a medium of truth by virtue of its very fictiveness. By recognising that he is a "liar of a more banal kind" (412), Nicholas pays homage to Conchis's more meaningful and substantial 'lies'. The very quality Nicholas is shown to be lacking is "imagination" (197). By "reinventing" (157) the world and "re-arranging reality" (219), Conchis's Godgame points to art's ability to reconstitute reality imaginatively. This imaginative ordering is differentiated from the banal fictive encodings of social convention/everyday habit by its superior ability to engender more than the routine understanding offered by conventional fictions.

In this way, *The Magus* is linked with modernist aesthetic concerns whereby formal reflexivity is "devoted to discovering the special validity of art and literature" (Russell, 183) as a "means to assert some kind of alternative value system" (Russell, 184). Conchis's problematisation of the truth value of art is answered by a reflexive defence of the inventive power of verbal form. Nicholas's realisation of Conchis's 'truths' – "Conchis's truths...matured in me" (646) – is simultaneously a discovery of the "rewards of the self – contained aesthetic realm" (Russell, 184) since 'truth' is always internally established. The position in which the novel ends, with Nicholas and Alison poised in a Keatsian frieze on the brink of reunion/separation in a "frozen present tense" (656), gives art the 'last word' in the novel. If the description of Alison as "anagram made flesh" (656) reminds us of her verbal status and, literally, of the novel's illusionism, it also strengthens the importance of art, demonstrating its ability to confer moments of special – and permanent – significance, suspending the banality of time, place and 'reality'.[25]

The existential moral dimension of the novel is, consequently, not that which is 'released' from art but that which is crystallised only within art. Existential meaning is a by-product of the artistic mode of consciousness which, by delivering Nicholas from the telos of reality, enables him to make the kind of meaning which is 'authentic'. Metaphor is a "weapon directed against reality" (Harries, 78) which creates a context for alternatives: freedom, choice. To this extent, fiction acquiesces in the definition of "existential man" who is an "organiser" (McQuarrie, 57), using "imaginative structures" (McQuarrie, 64) to break from "everyday patterns of living – the routine, the unthinking and humdrum" – and to provide 'creative moments of existing'

(64). An imaginative mode of understanding clearly gives Nicholas the opportunity to replace culturally and socially conditioned metaphors of reality with vital, self-created ones. Since the artistic imagination enables him to address what *is not*, Nicholas can emerge from the "Apparently sadistic conspiracy against the individual we call evolution. Existence. History." (479). Perceiving the 'bad faith' of his socially-determined self – "...English: born with masks and bred to lie" (372) – he must "find the courage to refuse all [his] social past, all [his] background" (555), unlike his parents who "never rose sufficiently above history" (15). In the end, Nicholas experiences a "loss of Englishness" (574), becoming an appropriately "speciesless" (574), autonomous self-determining existential being, unaffiliated to the "irrelevancies of race and nationality and economic class" (Olafson, 205). The existential self, then, is to all intents and purposes a fictional self since the genesis of the authentic subjectivity lies in imaginative acts which free it from outdated, hypostasised orders. Conchis's method in the Godgame is to decompose fragments of familiar, prior and wordly reality, reducing them to artistic material. World War One, for example, is "pure invention" (411). It is at the point in which 'world' becomes 'story' that existential meaning is catalysed. The moment of plenitude, thus, occurs in the aesthetic realm rather than in a world of contingencies.

iv

However, despite the elevated status granted to art by the reflexive commentary, and its invasion of 'life', the existential agenda of the novel seems to demand a residual concept of contingency (definable as that which is irreducible to plot and patterning). This results in a crucial ambiguity with regard to the establishment of 'authenticity' and gives rise to slippages which indicate a divergence between reflexive commentary and existential theme.

The reflexive position of the novel posits art as an alternative to the everyday world and, finally, as a substitute for that world so that Nicholas must "learn to perceive the fictional basis of everything" (Waugh, 112). At times, however, an 'authorial' stance ostensibly claims a substantially different ontological terrain, suggesting that authenticity can only be achieved in a space outside of structure. Language/art is by no means exempt from this ontological scheme. Conchis's narratives, for example, dissolve into a 'natural' order:

> as if story, narration, history, lay imbricated in the nature of things, and the cosmos was for the story, not the story for the cosmos. (149 – 50)

Nicholas's telepathic experience also induces an "awareness of pure being" (238) in which there is "no word" (238) – a state beyond the "dimensions and sensations" (238) conferred by language (238). Thus, he casts doubt on the ability of language to account for the real since "the act of description taints the description" (238):

> I was having feelings that no language based on concrete physical objects, on actual feeling, can describe...I knew words were like chains, they held me back; and like walls with holes in them. Reality kept rushing through... (239)

Conchis makes similar claims, negating the "attempt...to name reality"(410), and describing "all our explanations, our classifications, our aetiologies" (309) as a "thin net": "The net was nothing, reality burst through" (309).[26]

It is clear, however, that this conception of a prior and unmediated reality is rendered untenable in the novel, undercut by the logic of its reflexive commentary. Nicholas's recurrent metaphors of ativism and cyclicality seemingly lend support to the notion of a return to origins, to a primordial reality which is logically prior to the intervention of repressive human constructs – society, history, time. He describes the island, for example, as a "world before the machine, almost before man" (51), as "potential as a clean canvas" (63), giving him the feeling that "one was the very first man that had ever stood on it" (68), as well as a "*deja vu* feeling of having stood in the same place" (79). However, these remarks belong to highly ironised stretches of text, functioning as the testimony of the callow 'pre-Godgame' Nicholas steeped in romantic illusions. They also serve as an ironic preparation for the labyrinthine and invasive artifice of the island, disallowing the implicit nature/culture division in Nicholas's account. Nicholas's perception of a more authentic reality behind and beyond the organising structures of language finds expression, too, when he describes words as a "mist, over the reality of action, distorting, misleading, castrating" (190), granting them no more status than a "flimsy superstructure" (190). However, Nicholas's treatment of art/language as a distortive and self-protective barrier between self and world, figured in his "favourite metaphor: the cage of glass between me and the rest of the world" (35), stems from the 'experiencing' self's radical misconceptions and contrasts with the 'telling' self's acceptance of art/language as reality itself.[27]

This antithesis is registered in commentaries where, notwithstanding the problematic status of 'reality' in the novel, critics (in response to the residual existential demand for the 'real') not only retain a notion of life/contingency

to which Nicholas must return but, moreover, mould the reflexive commentary to the novel's preferred existential theme.

One critical approach has been to regard Conchis's embedded text with its labyrinthine plot as a structural homology for the novel as a whole, allowing it to enact the randomness, contingency and mystery of the existential 'real' with which it engages. By implication, the novel forestalls the Sartrean objection to unreal and neat orderings of experience such as occur in fictional universes. Rubenstein representatively suggests that "The structure of *The Magus* reflects its theme, in its numerous false endings which only temporarily resolve the resolutions of the plot" (337). Begnal similarly concludes that "Fowles simply, and intentionally, does not provide enough information to solve the mysteries and riddles of the narrative" (68) in order to portray a reality which is "mutidimensional" (69).[28] However, the question is whether the Godgame is a model of chaos or a model of order. As the novel's reflexive attention to its constructedness suggests, the Godgame's apparent disorder is simultaneously an immaculate order with a capacity to provide meaning. The novel, then, with its "eidetic imagery of beginning, middle and end, potency and cause" (Kermode, 138) is invariably a "destroyer of contingency" (Kermode, 137). Attempts to apply thematics to structure, in this light, are doomed.

A more sophisticated version of this reading recognises the novel's status as meaningful order and makes it the subject of reflexive 'problematisation', owing to the aesthetic tyranny it supposedly exercises. In this way, the Sartrean dissonance between novelistic ordering and the flux of contingent reality is foregrounded and the reflexive dilemma becomes one of avoiding the perils of an activity that involves imposing "static forms on the shifting material of reality" (Hussey, 25).

Eddins, one of the pioneers of this approach,[29] contends that the use of "eidetic" images (205):

> ...belies the contingency and the perpetual flux of reality. This dilemma of the novelist obviously derives, by analogy, from the existential dilemma of achieving authenticity – of avoiding Sartrean *mauvaise foi*.(205)

Since novel ordering is wholly 'inauthentic', yet unavoidable, the only way of "reconciling [one's] own ideations with the fortuitousness of existence" (205) lies in creating fictions which are "open towards contingency, perpetually modifying them and continually admitting their provisional, fictive

nature" (206). In this way, the tantalising power and authority of fiction can be disarmed, preventing the reader from the temptation of "substitut[ing] [its] forms for contingent reality" (Hussey, 23). The terms of this argument have been extended to the novel's ambiguous ending which poises Nicholas on the threshold of choice, thereby refusing to "impose a final order" (Hussey, 25) and "remaining true to Hazard" (Eddins, 216).[30]

By contending that narrative constitutes a "distortion of existential experience" (Marais, 32), these readings imply that such "existential experience" (and, hence, authenticity itself) lies in engagement with the contingent rather than the structured. Moreover, they assert that the novel reflexively 'humbles' itself, claiming only a modest status, in the name of existential liberation. This critical stance, however, would seem to bypass the considerable evidence that the self-referential admission of fictiveness is a source of strength, power and meaning rather than an invitation to dismiss *The Magus* as a temporary, arbitrary construct – "only a novel", as some critics imply. Indeed, in disagreement with Holmes, it may be argued that the exposure of the novel's "lack of solid footing in literal truth" (1985b, 348) is a cause for celebration, increasing the novel's authority, rather than a means of "challenging and undermining" (Holmes, 1985b, 348) that authority. This does not mean that Conchis's claim that "All is Hazard. And the only thing that will preserve us is ourselves" (129) is incompatible with Mrs de Seitas's "All is fiction" stance. Precisely because we are surrounded by contingency, we devise coherent, meaning-making narratives, metaphors and fictional orders. What is problematic in the novel (and even more so in critical commentaries), however, is the notion of a choice between a tantalising but dangerous art and an unadulterated life. What Nicholas actually chooses between are different orders of fiction. Indeed, by choosing art over the ordinary conventions/fictions of daily life (627), he is able to discern that "no single fiction is necessary" (627), though, paradoxically, art (the Godgame) itself, thereby, becomes a necessary fiction.

The same ambiguity is apparent in the novel's definition of the existential self, sliding between fictional and 'real' models.[31] As the existential theme retains a vestigial contingent reality behind forms, so it purportedly supports a 'real' self behind fictional masks. This 'authorial' position (coinciding with the voice of the mature Nicholas) is evident in the existential equation of fiction with tyrannical control, registered in Nicholas's comment about the

Author-God which serves as a metaphor for all the external forces that trammel the self:

> ...all my life I had tried to turn life into fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good or bad behaviour – a god like a novelist, to whom I turned, like a character with the power to please... (539)

This implies (negatively) a model of existential selfhood that is coherent, autonomous and prior to constructs, as the need to emerge from the plot of the Author-God (Conchis) implies.

Critical commentaries lend support to this notion of authentic selfhood, recuperating an unproblematic existential discourse. Alison and Lily/ Julie, for example, are mobilised as binary opposites, representing the polarised divisions of metaphor/reality, opaqueness/transparency. Thus, while Nicholas initially rejects Alison as "...in daily terms, dull and predictable, rather tediously *transparent*" (my emphasis, 387), his maturation process enables him to appreciate "her normality, her reality, her predictability; her *crystal* core of non-betrayal; her attachment to all Lily was not" (my emphasis, 553). Lily/Julie's insistent metaphoricity and her multiplicity of selves which refuse to coagulate into a coherent ego are seen as a threat in the way that aestheticism is claimed to rob life. Marais, for example, compares her to De Deukan's beautiful but deadly puppet, Mirabelle (31). Consequently, Nicholas can gain the love of the 'real' woman, Alison, only when "all fictions and illusions are set in perspective" (Friedman, 124).

Moreover, Nicholas's status as first-person narrator leads into a critical metaphor that binds philosophical and aesthetic concerns. Nicholas becomes the existentialist "author of his own life" (Eddins), whose imaging and shaping acts form a "creative existence" (Eddins, 207) that is in its own right an art, "in this case, an existentialist art" (207). "Stepping out of the "underworlde texte" of Conchis's imagination, and back into the reality of [his] own creativity" (Docherty, 121), he is the "god-like creator of his own drama" (Berets, 95) in the "position of creating and acting out his own patterns and goals of existence" (95) for which the act of narration becomes an analogy.

However, if these readings legitimately respond to a paradox inherent in the discourses of the text as such, they also rely on concepts of cohesiveness, autonomy and 'reality' that are problematic in the context of the reflexive commentary of the novel which considerably qualifies such a position.

After all, Alison's 'reality' status, as opposed to that of her ethereal rival, Lily/Julie, is a vexed question in the novel. Her supposed "inability to hide behind metaphor" (266) and the vision of the "naked, real self of her" (269) which she offers to Nicholas on Mt. Parnassus, in fact, proceed from the corrupted discourse of his 'experiencing' self and carry no weight as evidence of her existential 'good faith'. Indeed, while the Mt. Parnassus excursion is often read as an interlude of reality in the "outer world" (245) where Nicholas realises that the beauty and mystery of life are a "parallel experience" (259) to that of art, the novel undermines its location in a realm demarcated as 'life'. Nicholas's justification to Alison for remaining within the Godgame – "This experience. Its like being halfway through a book" (373) – not only serves to remind the reader of the fictiveness of the narrated events (coming roughly halfway through Fowles's book) but to suggest that the Mt. Parnassus experience is part of Conchis's book. After all, Nicholas only agrees to meet Alison because Conchis has engineered the temporary removal of the Godgame and she has, by this time, been worked into it so that 'life' fits in with Conchis's controlling narrative (art). In this light, Alison (the 'real' self) is not so far removed fron Lily/Julie, in the sense that she is a member of Conchis's 'cast', extending into her 'real life' where she equally plays roles. Nicholas's relegation of London and Alison to 'reality' at frequent intervals (49, 56, 111, 120), while carving out the division between art and life, also derives from his confused apprehension of levels of fiction/reality. It is precisely this misconception that the Godgame seeks to cure, paradoxically by closing the gap between art and life and revealing the fictional basis to reality. Alison's final status as "Reality" (647), then, is evidence of her textuality rather than her existential 'authenticity'.

Nicholas's position as autonomous creator, too, is reflexively undermined by his textual origins, insisted upon by the metalepsis which releases him into Fowles's plot. There is, thus, no point at which he is not watched by an Author-God, who coaxes him into place in an ending that completes a grand fictional design (thereby casting doubt on the claims for an open ending which is "true to Hazard"). Furthermore, the notion that Nicholas's education leaves off at the point where he is ready to become his 'own author' (the product of which is the narrative in front of us) is discredited by the novel's disallowance of the *bildungsroman* frame as a mode of authority, insofar as it purports to relate the 'true' experiences of a 'real' self. Conchis's "true confession" (133), after all, yields nothing but a series of fictional personas so that even his 'death' cannot be definitive. The 'life-story' as a medium of

self-revelation whereby the "mature Nicholas can interpret life while creating it" (Huffaker, 69) and the very concept of 'narrating the self' become problematic. The obtrusive sense of fictionality in the narrator's efforts to articulate his identity (literally becoming a third person) causes a loss of certainty in a reality behind a fictional self.

The textual location of character, moreover, provides a paradigm of the self which is not necessarily compatible with the claims for an existentially cohesive self. Conchis (as character) and, particularly Lily/Julie, might be said to have chameleon selves rather than an easily accessible, unitary self. This protean defiance and deferral of achieved identity may be assimilated to existential philosophy since a "person's existence is [not] preceded by an essential core of identity" (Holmes, 1985b, 353), yet it equally comes into conflict with an existential theme which casts suspicion on artifice as a model of selfhood.

Once again, the novel maintains an equipoise between two irreconcilable poles. While Conchis's magician parable suggests that to be a "magician oneself" (552) is to accept the creative constructs that create meaning and, hence, existential subjectivity itself, existential authenticity at some level in the novel simultaneously seems to demand an 'honesty' and transparency of self-presentation that is inimical to role-playing. Nicholas's inauthentic self is figured as a "stiff mask" (58) while his creation of a third-person fictional self for Lily/Julie is designed to manipulate a favourable – yet false – self-image removed from his 'real' self:

> So we talked about Nicholas: his family, his ambitions, his failings. The third person is apt, because I presented a sort of fictional self to them, a victim of circumstances, a mixture of attractive raffishness and essential inner decency. (348)

Thus, Wight and Grant equate Nicholas's "theatricality" with "misperceptions and selfishness" (85), suggesting that "By the end of the story, Nicholas has had his fill of putting on an act for the benefit of anyone, himself above all" (86). Bourani (meaning skull), in this light, is a site of penetration into inner being, infiltrating the recesses of the self buried beneath the incrustations of role-playing. However, the reflexive commentary mitigates against such a straightforward movement from "enclosure to plenitude" (Burden, 1980, 160). The more Nicholas 'exposes' in the Godgame, the more he uncovers fictional layers, to the extent that the possibilities for a borderline between a real and a fictive self diminish. The correlation of role-playing with inauthenticity contrasts with Billy's counter-claim that "genuine existence

depends on mastery of persistent role-playing and illusion making" (129), vouching for the endurance of play-acting selves in *The Magus*. This ambivalence points to a novel which is torn between two powerful alternatives which are, ultimately, the philosophical and the fictional.

Thus, there is no neat fit of existential and reflexive concerns in a novel in which these discourses simultaneously overlap, legitimate each other, diverge from each other and disallow each other. Indeed, the novel represents a struggle over signifieds – that of an existential thematic and that of a reflexive statement about the nature of fictions which constitutes a referent in its own right, going beyond the 'interests' of the existential discourse. At this level, story and storytelling undergo a split. Rubenstein's diagnosis of what she perceives to be the "problem" of the novel – "...one does not know whether Fowles is being ironic or profound in presenting the protagonist's mythical quest, followed by a belated transformation at the hands of a morally ambiguous self-styled god-madman" (337) – provides a useful vocabulary for negotiating the existential/reflexive dissent. If the existential quest is to be regarded as "profound", then art, consequently must be rendered "ironic", debilitated in the name of 'authenticity'. However, if the art commentary is regarded as "profound", then the existential journey becomes "ironic", the very concept of authenticity assaulted by fictional encroachment. Critical schemas and metaphors that bind the two discourses into an interlocking explanatory mechanism thereby bypass the considerable points of breakdown engendered by a discursive alliance that, nonetheless the text clearly offers.

In this vein, the image of an ordered fictional heterocosm implicit in the novel's reflexive postion is itself subject to disintegration under the conflictual forces that erupt in the novel. This ferment of discourses ruptures the frame of an ordered textual cosmos that the novel reflexively seeks to give itself.

V

If the 'modernist' reflexive commentary defines "telling" as "individual invention, spontaneous fabrication at the expense of external reality" (Waugh, 18), there are instances in the novel where metaphor (which keeps 'reality' at bay) threatens to become discourse. This incipient postmodernism stems from a situating urge whereby the novel points to its conventionality of construction and its participation in systems of signification which are

logically prior to the aesthetic operations of a creative imagination. These postmodern 'moments' disrupt the notion of metaphor as a "species of suprarational truth" (Wasson, qtd. in Bertens, 19) and disallow fictional language as a higher discourse so that it cannot harden into a privileged, self-contained, essentialised truth.[32]

Mrs de Seitas's comment near the novel's end offers such a postmodern insight, suggesting that our "ordinary lives" (627) are composed of "necessary fictions" (627), arbitrary, pre-fabricated and provisional codes and orders which make meaning available. Nicholas's own suggestion that "All Conchis's manoeuverings had been to bring me to this; all the charades, the physical, the theatrical, the sexual, the psychological" (518) implicates art, too, in this discursive network, in keeping with Russell's postmodern observation that "as a language, art cannot be considered separately from cultural languages in general" (187).

Thus, a modernist reflexive conception of 'Art' as an "autonomous universe of pure possibility unchained to the empirical or normative orders" (Graff, 406) is minimally displaced by a postmodern definition of art as "institutionalised illusion" (279), adhering to a finite, limited and conventional range of signification. Intertextuality, in this light, not only sets up thematic and formal parallels in the novel but approaches parody in its "pragmatic" (Hutcheon, 1985, 55) ability to foreground the repertoires and codes of aesthetic representation. Nicholas's 'story', for example, employs a basic plot-type (the progress of a "hero" in "pursuit" of self-fulfillment, aided by a "helper") and repeats it through various generic traditions and literary paradigms (and their attendant symbols, motifs and images) – both traditional and contemporary. Thus, it draws on the conventions of mythic quest and trial, of romance and gothic suspense, of Jungian psychic "individuation", [33] of 'realist' *bildungsroman* education and existential "becoming".

Nicholas's observation that Alison's "return" does not require "some spectacular re-entry, some mysterious call, a metaphorical, perhaps even literal descent into a modern Tartarus" (647) constitutes a 'postmodern moment', recognising the conventionality and the historicity of novel genres. As a modern novel, *The Magus* calls for the banal closely observed depiction of 'life' that is particular to the realist convention rather than the mythic landscape of the traditional trial novel: "...this most banal of scenes, this most banal of London, this reality as plain and dull as wheat" (647). The modernist claim that London (reality) is subsumed by Art is disrupted by a

postmodern acknowledgement that London is a "scene", a technical mode of representation laden with the imperatives of the realist paradigm. Fictional construction, by implication, is always underwritten by conventional methods of representation.

Even the existential discourse (the moral core of the novel) is given minimal postmodern treatment. The metaleptic shift in narrative voice in chapter seventy-eight illustrates this:

> The smallest hope, a bare continuing to exist, is enough for the anti-hero's future; leave him, *says our age*, leave him where mankind is in its history, at a crossroads, in a dilemma, with all to lose and only more of the same to win; let him survive, but give him no direction... (my emphasis, 645)

This not only announces the presence of the Novelist-God positioning Nicholas in his fictive composition (as the modernist metacommentary suggests) but shows him to be following a 'recipe', a conventional pattern which situates his rampant modernist creativity. By locating Nicholas's textual future within a particular period of literary construction – a modern age – and within a particular philosophical/literary tradition, it is shown to be structurally and semantically overdetermined. The existential discourse, while largely reliant on realist representational procedures, has its own "sense of an ending" which leaves the protagonist in a suggestive position of "cruel freedom", disallowing the resolutions offered by the social order. As such, existentialism is itself enclosed in "cheerfully irreverent quotation marks" (Bakhtin, qtd. in Hutcheon, 1985, 41) which demarcate it as an artificial rather than a 'natural' position.[34]

Similarly, while the Godgame attempts to contain its "heteroglossia" under the rubric of Art, it cannot totally suppress its election of a multitude of "stories" and styles. In charting the progress of a self (purportedly himself), Conchis narrates his 'life experiences' – Neuve Chapelle and his decision to desert, his romance with Lily, his encounters with De Deukans and Henrik and the tragedy of World War Two – in an overblown, vividly detailed "realist" register. His masterful imitation of the frames of reference of any number of historic war action narratives (including the terse recitation of military tactics, the build-up of suspense, even a commander called "Montague", 122 – 123), the rich evocation of his lonely Edwardian boyhood complete with childhood illnesses and music lessons, his romance with "the girl next door", Lily, and the detailed 'natural history' of his ornithological trip to Norway expose Conchis's realism as a technique, a collection of

set-pieces. His story-telling ingenuity ultimately derives from his consummate knowledge of conventional literary and cultural orderings.

The profusion of stories in Conchis's text is matched by an array of 'languages' or styles and an attendent variation in means of transmission. Thus, the cohesive fictional language claiming to be the modernist "real reality" continually erupts into discourse as external reality in its textualised and represented forms becomes drawn into the art work. As reader, Nicholas encounters the mythic 'language' of the Apollo masque, Lily's Edwardian romance text, Conchis's historical realism, as well as the Freudian jargon used to 'analyse' him during his trial. These "worlds in the plural" (McHale, 37) provide a postmodern sense of the ontological multiplicity of the constructs of fiction and of the world. As interpretative structures drawn from the "realm of what is usually thought to be objectively real and from the realm of what is either empirically untrue or unverifiable" (Holmes, 1985a, 51), these discourses are shown to be similarly valid, if similarly slippery, constructed and partial (as the open parody of Freudian 'language' implies).

This "ontological landscape" (Pavel, qtd.in McHale, 37) is compounded by the use of oral narrative and live performance (the Apollo masque, Julie/June's "dramas", the "Greek Resistance" episode, as well as other "textual illustrations"), books (the erotic book of breasts, the 'explanation' of the masque, the poetry book containing Pound and Eliot), pamphlets (the manifesto of the Society of Reason, the "Alarme for Sinners") and 'historical document' (Anton's account of the barbaric treatment of three resistance fighters during the Nazi occupation of Greece). Even film, music and visual art are elements in Conchis's multimedia spectacle. Conchis and Lily/Julie play the harpsichord and recorder, respectively, while a variety of 'period' songs illuminate Conchis's narratives. Conchis shows Nicholas a home movie of Anton and Wimmel, the German officers he was acquainted with as mayor of the village, and Nicholas is later subjected to a pornographic film starring Lily and Joe. Conchis's gallery of 'original' paintings, the Poseidon statue and a variety of *objets d' art* feature in the Godgame. This cache of representational techniques enables a self-reflexive recognition of ontological plurality. By 'retextualising' the multitudinous texts, discourses and languages of Western history and culture, the Godgame cannot, despite the claims of the modernist reflexive commentary, confine them to the context of art. Indeed, the Godgame offers Nicholas 'reality' in textualised form and suggests that the world itself is only obtainable discursively.

In the light of the postmodern functioning of intertextuality in *The Magus*, the notion of reading as an intratextual process guided by the assumption of aesthetic purpose is also revised. The generic mixedness of the Godgame and the conventional literary knowledge needed to cope with it is illustrated when Nicholas likens Lily, as she plays the recorder in a posed Edwardian musical soiree, to a "genre picture" (155), when he describes his encounter with Julie and June as "a modulation into the world of Beaumarchais, of Restoration comedy" (315), thereby drawing on his "encyclopedic knowledge" (Eco, 121) of the play on identities endemic to that particular literary genre, and when the Godgame's transformation from a pastoral comic world to an insidious, tragic and violent one, as Nicholas's romance identity is wrenched away from him before his trial begins, elicits a comparison with "some freak misbinding in a book, a Lawrence novel became, at the turn of a page, one by Kafka" (489). This indicates that decoding operates through the reader's activation of genre rules, conventions and intertextual frames which release "over-coded" meaning. As an "active principle of interpretation" (Eco, 4), Nicholas proceeds through a "treasury of intertextuality" (Eco, 121), producing "inferential walks" (Eco, 32) or "narrative forecasts" garnered from intertextual discursive frames.[35] The discovery of an old-fashioned scented woman's glove leads into a generically inferred 'story' of intrigue and mystery (89), as he speculates about the presence of a mysterious woman, based on his knowledge of romance and gothic plots. Conchis's gnomic utterances ("Are you elect?... "I am psychic", 102), similarly, are construed as part of a supernatural/occult 'story': "...it all pointed to spiritualism" (102). In this light, while Nicholas's readerly expectations are often exploited, frustrated and shown to be mistaken, they are clearly programmed by an intertext. In particular, Nicholas's frustration derives from his internalised frames of 'authorship'. He expects that Conchis's narrative will yield up meaning in linear, progressive fashion, guided by a 'reliable', overarching authorial voice. This demand for the gratification of 'meaning' prompts Conchis's comment "Is this how they teach you at Oxford now? One reads last chapters first?" (139), playing on Nicholas's sense that authorial intention must be 'delivered up'. However, since Conchis as author is postmodernly drained into fictive codes and discursive screens, Nicholas must make meaning by "grasping the rules of the game" (139), revealing reading to be a rule-bound activity based on generic competence.

However, if the Godgame is a field strewn with fictional cues, leaving Nicholas to play "the role of the reader", he is not mechanically 'subjected' to

the text. As reader, he is equipped with a history of encounters with other discourses and textual experiences. As Fowler indicates, the reader is equally a "repository of the culture's linguistically-coded values" (79), endowed with the power of releasing them from the text. This is illustrated by Lily/Julie who is not only constituted by Conchis's text but by Nicholas's "male gaze". In 'reading' (284) her, Nicholas clearly favours a cultural frame that interpellates her as fragile, idealised womanhood in need of his protection, ranging from her 'romance' identity as Conchis's Edwardian fianceé, to the role of ethereal classics student/actress, to a helpless schizophrenic patient appealing to Nicholas's masculine instincts. The method of the Godgame, then, is to present Nicholas with tantalisingly fragmented images which he is called upon, in Iserian fashion, to complete. However, if "Urfe's imagination rushes in to supply the missing colours and shades" (Wolfe, 92), it is an imagination that is culturally and discursively conditioned.[36] His "simulated fantasies" (Wolfe, 92) about Lily/Julie, investing her with romance and mythic potential, derive from conventional cultural and literary representations of women:[37]

> That extinct Lawrentian woman of the past, the woman inferior to man in everything but that one great power of female dark mystery and beauty. (242)

Nicholas is confronted with his conventionalised frames of decoding when he is forced to watch a film showing Lily/Julie (in her many guises) and himself at various stages of the Godgame. This modulates into a highly embellished pornographic film in the exaggerated mode of the silent movie in which Lily/Julie plays a variety of prostitutes, vamps and "scarlet women", revealing to what extent Nicholas has placed her within stereotyped female modes. The transition to footage of Alison and Nicholas on Mt. Parnassus suggests how Alison, too, has been positioned by his sexual assumptions based on the Virgin/Whore dualism. In this way, Nicholas is implicitly taught how 'life' is read through hermeneutic codes and conventions. The Godgame provides a dehabitualising experience for him so that he can begin to discern how his world has been constituted.[38] Rather than reflecting Nicholas's 'real' self (as humanist readings of *The Magus* imply), it reveals a self constructed in and by semiosis.

The codified production and consumption of fiction carries implications for the notion of character, too. Postmodern reflexivity extends the concept of the textual construction of character, as announced in the modernist reflexive position, towards a recognition of the conventional constitution of char-

to subvert this assumption of aesthetic privilege.[40] In so doing, *The Magus* anticipates *The French Lieutenant's Woman* where overt postmodern parody

acters. Nicholas's "old self" (49) belonging to the opening liberal-humanist 'realist' narrative clearly does not "hold out" (49) in its encounter with Conchis's postmodern plural text which reveals the way in which characters are constituted within conventional literary codes: the realistic 'developing' protagonist, the classical quester, the romance hero, the existential anti-hero. In the constitution of Julie as character/subject, the postmodern meta-commentary goes beyond an investigation of "literariness" towards a recognition of the theory of the subject, with its 'real life' implications. Nicholas's constitution at the intersection of the discourses that traverse him (within a quest pattern that delves into social, historical, sexual and cultural arenas) and Julie's interpellation as subject of a masculine text are suggestive of the places individuals come to occupy within various formations – social, political, sexual, cultural. This situated subjectivity negates the notion of the consciousness as centre of initiative.[39]

This is true, too, of the author whose modernist position as the origin and end of the fictional world is threatened by the 'situating' of novel construction within the interstices of conventional aesthetic systems. If the metalepsis provides a site of authorial entry into the fiction, the diegetic play with narrative levels also challenges this authority. The constant undermining of narrative authority from Nicholas, to Conchis, to a third-person voice assigned to Fowles himself suggests that the author is a "particular vacant space that may in fact be filled by different individuals" (Foucault, 1972, 96). The way in which "narrators" come to occupy the ontological realm of "characters" means that the textual entry of the higher metaleptic voice makes *it* available as a "fiction", a constructed and inferred position and no less a narrative convention than the more limited first-person mode. Moreover, as "author of the fiction", Conchis takes up various positions towards Nicholas – sadistic torturer, omniscient authority, devious trickster, benign wisdom – suggesting that the author can be retrieved as the subject of the codes and authorial guises that constrain aesthetic creativity.

The Magus, then, begins to deconstruct its own modernist position by locating fictions (and, by implication, consciousness) in conventional, historical and discursive processes. If its modernist commentary elevates art as the groundwork of meaning, a submerged postmodern sense of the conventionality and the historical provisionality of all constructs (fictional and 'worldly') starts to subvert this assumption of aesthetic privilege.[40] In so doing, *The Magus* anticipates *The French Lieutenant's Woman* where overt postmodern parody

serves to locate and implicate narrative in historically specific contexts. The resistance this sets up to any notions of aesthetic 'truth' and the way in which postmodern reflexivity interrelates with and displaces the possibility of existentialism as final "signified" are issues that will be taken up in the discussion to follow.

THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN

i

Few recent novels have commanded the kind of critical attention and acclaim that *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles's third published work, has received. It has been claimed, variously, by psychoanalysis,[1] by historiography,[2] by existential philosophy[3] and by a plethora of literary and narrative theories which have appropriately focused on its innovative reflexive techniques. While the novel has been categorised as postmodern, both by implication and more explicitly (Todd, Cohen, Fokkema, Burden 1980), remarkably few commentators have manifestly examined it in the light of contemporary theories of the postmodern. Exceptions are Hutcheon (1988, 1989), McHale and Waugh who give it sporadic treatment within their predominantly theoretical studies, while Siegle provides the fullest account of postmodern reflexivity in the novel so far, though focused on concepts of authorship.[4] As such, my contribution to the considerable body of exegesis that deals with *The French Lieutenant's Woman* as a reflexive fiction will be to extend existing work and situate its self-reflexivity within a postmodern frame. Moreover, I will demonstrate that the conjunction of reflexivity with humanist existentialist thematics has led to the marginalisation of the more radical postmodern implications of the novel's metacommentary. I will proceed, therefore, by taking up the issue of historically specific narrative conventions, problematising the existential narrative in its turn (section one to three). This leads into an examination of the 'reality behind the fiction', developing the central concerns of conventionality and historical interpretation (section four) and then applying them to the notion of subjectivity exemplified by characters/authors/readers (section five). Finally, I will draw these concerns together by examining the interactions between reflexivity/existentialism in view of the paradigm of postmodernism I have delineated (section six).

The model of postmodernism I will follow is that which Hutcheon offers in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), although I will also consider the contributions of other theorists to the "postmodern debate". Hutcheon defines the postmodern as a "complicitous critique" (1989, 2) which inhabits received forms of representation – both literary and public – in order to "denaturalise" and interrogate their conventional, ideological and partial nature. Thus, the 'real' is restored as enunciative context, as the matrix of material forces which condition particular utterances. In Macdonell's words, discourse may be "particular area[s] of language use" (2) but these "differ with the kind of institutions and social practices in which they take shape..." (1). As "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* turns to history as enunciative situation, establishing the historicity of all representation through a survey-history of literary forms.

The novel, thus, makes overt the tentative postmodern gestures of *The Magus*. In particular, it is advantaged by the use of third-person narrative with overt first-person intrusion, allowing for "metafictional dislocation much more obviously than first-person narratives" (Waugh, 132) where the " "telling" is realistically motivated because produced by a personalised figure who is given a spatio-temporal dimension within the fictional world" (Waugh, 133). As Eddins points out, the development of the author-persona from "pervasive presence to spokesman" (217) allows for an intensified reflexivity, effectively playing off mimesis against diegesis. The indirect internalised reflexivity of *The Magus* whereby "...the reader "overhears" Conchis's remarks and "shares" Nicholas's disillusionments" (Eddins, 217) is replaced by the "direct communication" (217) afforded by the unreserved voice of the authorial narrator. This narrator-author shares none of the ambiguities of Conchis's role since he is not simultaneously a character and can comment on the narrative action he is creating with greater ease and flexibility (Holmes, 1981, 184). Furthermore, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is able to foreground the act of writing via its authorial narrator whose sorting and selecting presence is far more manifest than that of the shadowy Conchis whose 'novel' appears as a finished structure of order (in accordance with the modernist metacommentary that is predominant in *The Magus*).

It is particularly the novel's employment of a parodic mode (tentatively used in *The Magus*) that is central to its postmodern character. Hutcheon calls

parody " a privileged mode of postmodern formal self-reflexivity" (1988, 35) since its "double-coded" (1989, 101) voice is able to install and undermine, to legitimate and subvert that which it parodies. In this way, it can question the very forms and ideologies it invokes and purveys, exposing the "politics of representation" (Hutcheon, 1989, 94). Since it implicates itself in the way in which meanings are culturally, socially, and historically produced, parody traverses the bounds of the introverted, self-referring art-work (seminal to modernist poetics) towards 'worldly' engagement. Notwithstanding the formalist differentiation between non-referential 'literary' language and the transactional language in daily use, the postmodern novel insists on its participation in the systems of signification that grant conditioned meaning and value to the reality they construct and represent.[5] As Hutcheon claims, "...it is art as discourse that is what is intimately connected to the political and the social" (1989, 35). In this light, parody provides not only an interiorised self-mirroring commentary on art as art but a materially motivated exposure of "art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past" (Hutcheon, 1989, 101), as fragile and value-laden representation.

Drawing on Poirier's distinction between "other" and "self" directed parody, Hannoosh defines parody as a reflexive mode with a "capacity to reflect critically back upon itself, not merely upon its target" (113). Since parodic revision of old conventions and codes "challenges the notion of fixed works altogether" (113), it "cannot legitimately propose itself as the definitive one, since by its own example it belies the concept of a definitive or authoritative work " (114). Thus, Hannoosh concludes that:

> parodic reflexivity does not mean simply that the parody refers to itself as a text about texts, reflecting upon itself by analogy, as it has been defined hitherto. It has more radical implications than mere self-reference: the parody actually rebounds upon itself, calling itself into question as it does the parodied work, and suggesting its own potential as a model or target, a work to be rewritten, transformed, even parodied in its turn. (114)

By revealing the "arbitrary and elusive nature of interpretative constructs" (Bennett, 32), postmodern parody not only discloses the provisionality and incompleteness of its target but also its *own* tenuous and vulnerable status. Thus, it rejects the formalist definition of parody as a "dialectical substitution of formal elements whose functions have become mechanized or automatic" (Hutcheon, 1985, 35) since this implies that the interchange of old and new constitutes an improvement of artistic consciousness.

ii

Much has been made of the novel's parodic reprise of the styles, structures and thematic concerns of the Victorian novels of historical realism and romance.[6] Fowles recreates the Victorian realist novel by annexing a "ready-made 1860's plot" (Costa, 2) and peopling it with a repertory of recognisable 'types' lifted from the annals of Victorian literature. The debonair hero, Charles Smithson, a leisured aristocratic dilettante, his pert, if insipid, fiancée, Ernestina, and the enigmatic 'outcast' figure, Sarah Woodruff, who disturbs the proper social destiny of the hero, constitute the stereotypical 'love triangle', while a set of Dickensian grotesques and cameos comprise the rest of the cast – the Cockney servant, Sam, heir to Dickens's "immortal" (41) Sam Weller, the sweet serving-lass, Mary, the kindly old-maid, Aunt Tranter, Charles's gruff bachelor uncle, the terrifyingly censorious Mrs Poulteney and the wry sceptic, Dr Grogan. Employing the leisurely, swollen pace of Victorian 'grand style', the plot interpolates customary disclosures of background and circumstance (Charles's chequered 'career' is a case in point), episodes of social comedy *a lá* Jane Austen in the drawing-rooms and concert hall of the oppressively parochial Lyme Regis, the tensional cause and effect crises of serial fiction and neatly balanced antithetical configurations of structure (parallel master and servant romances, for example) and character (pitching Ernestina against Sarah). This is played out against a vividly detailed pictorial counter of 'facts', ranging over minutely itemised details of fashion, accurate norms of speech and etiquette, a graphically observed socio-geographical guide to Lyme Regis, Exeter and London (including interiors of homes, streets, shops, brothels) and a wide ranging social background, spanning the aristocracy (Charles, his uncle), the world of trade (Mr Freeman), through to the servant class of which Sam is a reluctant and short-lived exemplar.

This intelligible and apparently solid fictional world is controlled by the voice of the omniscient authorial narrator who intrudes in the manner of Trollope and Thackeray's "puppet-masters" and provides a didactic-ethical guidance reminiscent of George Eliot, qualifying and ranking characters according to their moral fitness. Bolstering the authentic historicity of his text, the narrator vouches for its 'truth' and reliability by inviting the reader to put him "to the test" (7). The "proof" (8) he proffers may be found not only in the ostensible world 'beyond' his telescoped description of the Lyme quay in chapter one but in the documents he displays for the reader's inspection –

the Trial of Emil de la Ronciere, the series of epigraphs and footnotes which criss-cross the novel's pages – importing a wealth of sociological and cultural detail into the novel and presenting a ligament between 'text' world and 'real' world that seemingly affirms his claims of veracity.

However, the novel's ostensible concern to record the *vraisemblable* of a culture is punctuated by the activities of a narrator intent on exposing the artificial literary codes that designate the realist contract. Leaping over the bounds of narrative omniscience that realism respects, he grants *effets de reel* and literary characters an ironised 'real life' location (telling us that Mary's great grand – daughter is a well known English film – actress (69), that he owns Sarah's Toby Jug (241) and that a "fashionable London architect" now owns Millie's father's rural cottage (138)), provides glosses on period linguistic norms usually employed to 'naturalise' the historically depicted fictional world (112, 115) and draws attention to the setting up of traditional literary symbolism, as in the functioning of Mrs Poulteney's chimney as a "simile of her social status" (21).[7] This 'laying bare' of the realist paradigm serves simultaneously to reveal the novel's diachrony (or synchronicity). Long before the notorious authorial digression in chapter thirteen which catapults the novel out of 1867 and into the "age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes" (85), it announces its modernity by disturbing its historic "realeme" (McHale, 52). Adopting the realist habit of creating a credible *Weltanschaaung* through incorporating 'real life' people or events in the fictional universe, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* engenders a series of temporal disjunctions by including historical figures and phenomena – Henry Moore (7), Karl Marx (16), Hitler (29), the Gestapo (23), McLuhan (37), Brechtian alienation effects (54), radio and television (84) – that postdate the historical setting invoked. The novel's epigraphs function similarly, supplementing the contemporaneous voices of the Victorian poets with the revisionary perspectives of Marx and Darwin, among others.

Alongside the parody of Victorian realist conventions (5), the novel exhibits and ironises a selection of romance 'stock in trade' techniques.[8] Although the romance discourse of the novel relies on and occupies realist techniques, it stresses the interiority of the subjective psychological state rather than the relation of the individual to the 'outer' social world. As Northrop Frye observes, "...the romance...often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks" (qtd. in Loveday, 9) by filling realist frames with emotional material. Furthermore, the romance nurtures a "desire to restore to prose

fiction "the improbable and marvellous" which the sentimental novel of contemporary life had disavowed" (Fiedler, qtd. in Binns, 1973, 331), hence its characteristic properties of allegory, archetype, myth and mystery. The romance propensity to "polarise and heighten" (Loveday, 9) is manifested in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by its ironised use of archetypal characterisation, mythical, symbolically invested settings and an accentuated, melodramatic plot.

Thus, Charles's complaint about Lyme Regis, "That's the trouble with provincial life. Everyone knows everyone and there is no mystery. No romance" (14), points to the tension between realist and romance paradigms as the safe, parochial 'realist' world of Lyme Regis is invaded by romance in the person of Sarah who represents the dark, 'dangerous' *femme fatale*, as opposed to the 'safe', fragile Ernestina in her role as "angel-in-the-house". Charles, consequently, becomes the romance quester figure, a "Sir Galahad" moving forward in "full armour" (381) to claim his 'damsel' (this time, Sarah as heroine), giving the realist love triangle new and exaggerated qualities. The setting of much of this romance action is the Undercliff of Ware Commons (as opposed to the drawing-rooms and public places of the 'realist' action) whose Edenic lushness serves as an analogue to the heightened sensations and passions unleashed there.

Two plot strands comprise the romance parody in the novel. Charles's 'trial' whereby he must undergo a series of "tests" devised by Sarah who is both the catalyst of and the reward for this search for inner truth or 'heart's desire' rehearses the classical romance pattern of quest and adventure. Simultaneously, the plot is invaded by gothic inflation and sensationalism, especially the prominent device of unresolved chapter endings which attain the histrionic contours of the 'cliffhanger'. The stock nature of this device is displayed in the typified romance question with which chapter twelve ends:

> Who is Sarah?
> Out of what shadows does she come? (84)

The banal riposte of chapter thirteen – "I do not know" (85) – serves as a cutting edge to the romance discourse, advertising the novel's participation in artificial literary conventions. The traditional literary antecedents of the novel's romance reconstruction are also showcased in Mrs Talbot's ostentatious envisionings, culled from the popular literature of her youth. The images of "starving heroines" lying "huddled on snow-covered doorsteps or fevered in some bare, leaking garret" and of a "pursued woman" jumping from a cliff, amidst lightning (49) that feed Mrs Talbot's imagination are

ironically resurrected in the novel which cites the motifs of the Persecuted Maiden, seduction and flight in a plot of disjunction, misunderstanding and falsehood. It is precisely these images which fuel Charles's vision of Sarah "running sodden through the lightning and rain" (180) before the final climactic meeting on Ware Commons, set significantly against a growing storm. Sarah initially adopts the role of Persecuted Heroine, even contriving to prick her finger on a thorn (157) in a Hardyesque moment which points to the deliberate setting up of romantic symbol-making machinery. Later, Sarah's role modulates into that of temptress, employing her 'guilty secret' to enthrall the captivated Charles. After the famed seduction scene and the revelation of Sarah's 'truth', the intervention of Sam in the role of 'villain', intercepting Charles's offer of love and marriage, prolongs the tortuous plot, taking it into the conventional realms of flight and pursuit, as Charles hunts for the vanished Sarah.

The intrusive narrator underscores the ironised nature of the romance narrative mode in the novel by reflexively defamiliarising its typified techniques and styles. When he declares that he is "overdoing the exclamation marks" (181) and apologetically admits to "mixing metaphors" (164), he directs us to the extravagant, lurid register that marks the crisis moments of the convoluted romance melodrama. Sarah's letter to Charles, inviting him to a final tryst on Ware Commons, provokes the exclamatory:

> The French! Varguennes! (180)

as Charles identifies himself as surrogate French Lieutenant. The discovery of Sarah's false conduct elicits a similar rhetoric:

> Why? Why? Why?
> Blackmail!
> To put him totally in her power! (307)

Standardised features of typography, syntax, punctuation and style also mark the uncovery of Sam's perfidy:

> Sam! A thief! A spy! (345)

These very elements hallmark Charles's romantic reveries about Sarah which recapitulate the Flaubertian purple prose of *Madame Bovary*, itself a parody and critique of romance conventions:

> They should go abroad as soon as his affairs could be settled...perhaps Germany first, then south in winter to Florence or Rome (if the civil conditions allowed) or perhaps Spain. Granada! The Alhambra! Moonlight, the distant sound below of singing gypsies such grateful, tender eyes...and in some jasmine-scented room they would lie awake, in each other's

> arms, infinitely alone, exiled, yet fused in that loneliness, inseparable in that exile. (343-344)

The narrator's admission that he 'controls' the allocation of conventional literary codes in the novel, thereby denying Sarah the grand romantic gesture of killing herself in a manner reminiscent of the Persecuted Heroine poised on the cliff in Mrs Talbot's feverish imagination, is also a self-reflexive disclosure of the romance convention's status as a fictional code which has been appropriated and parodied:

> I will not make her teeter on the window-sill;
> or sway forward, and then collapse sobbing back
> on to the worn carpet of her room. (84)

Since chapter thirteen is regarded as a "discussion of the terms on which the novel is written" (McEwan, 26), it presumably provides a *raison d'être* for the ironic rehandling of Victorian realist and romance conventions from a contemporary perspective. The narrator drops the observing and describing activities of the Victorian voice and adopts a modern insistence on the novel's status as creative construct which is sustained by imaginative rather than 'real life' reference:

> This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. (85)

This digression has usually been interpreted through the prism of existentialist thematics, amply encouraged by a narator who, in the best existential manner, tells us that "a genuinely created world must be independent of its creator" (86) and that "There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (86). Concurring with Rankin's proposal that chapter thirteen is a "rather subtle reinforcement of the concepts of freedom, evolution, survival and obsolescence which form the thematic basis of the novel" (193), many commentators have regarded it as a critique and rejection of omniscient narration in the light of an existential world-view with a marked distaste for "telling" in the Victorian manner. Cohen, for example, asserts that "the problem with Victorian fiction from an existential point of view...is its tendency to view its own conventions as accurate representations of reality" (152), hence the need "to repudiate Victorian omniscience and omnipotent manipulation of... characters" (157). Conradi echoes this opinion, commenting on the narrator's "doubts about his own use of omniscient narration on the grounds of its non-democratic nature" (68), as does Hutcheon who remarks that a "new, equally "vital" form must emerge from its antiquated conventions" (1980, 59). Indeed, Rankin reads chapter thirteen as an apology for the use of such forms: "[the narrator] must excuse

it by claiming that the omniscient stance is one he takes only because 'I am writing in... a convention universally accepted at the time of my story'" (195). As such, chapter thirteen seems to be a rationale for jettisoning an outworn and authoritarian mode of narration in favour of a modern existentialist aesthetic that delivers the freedom of the 'open' form, no longer "decreeing" but in the "new theological image, with freedom our first principle, not authority" (86).

Despite the obvious temptation to read the chapter in terms of existential themes applied to aesthetics, such readings foreclose on its postmodern self-reflexivity. The ironic revival of Victorian realism/romance is regarded in these accounts as "other directed" parody which is "anxious to suggest that life or history has made certain literary styles outmoded" (Poirier, 1986, 339). By targetting Victorian convention as the 'victim' of a parodic mode that foregrounds the "artifice or factitiousness of its model's representation of reality, reversing the formal self-effacement on which the parodied discourse depends for its claims to mimesis or truth" (Bennett, 29), these critical commentaries deflect the extent to which parody in the novel is "self directed", pointing to the flimsiness of representation *per se*. Moreover, as a postmodern 'history' of artistic representation, the novel is a 'many-voiced' discursive construct, in the manner of Bakhtinian "heteroglossia", which is invaded by parody at all levels, not only in terms of its realist and romance reconstructions. It is by spelling out this multipolar, hybrid nature of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* that we may begin to see it as a postmodern commentary on the conventionality and arbitrariness of all representation – both fictional and 'worldly'.

iii

While most commentators would seem to agree that existential ethics are held up as a "moral norm" (Rankin, 205) in the novel and that Fowles is "doctrinaire in his commitment to existentialism" (Hagopian, 191), the existential discourse is itself problematised by the implications of a postmodern self-reflexivity which will not sanction the sovereignty of "master narratives". The existential narrative of the novel occupies, updates and rewrites both its realist and romance modes. The realist convention with its vast reticulation of socio-cultural 'facts' becomes suggestive of entrapment within an imprisoning set of institutions which pre-determine and, hence, restrict personal freedom and choice. Against this background, the classic romance

quest is given an existential slant, the search no longer for 'heart's truth' but for the 'truth' of the authentic consciousness. The culmination of this quest can no longer obtain in a union of true love but in the state of mind of the alienated self, poised in 'good faith' beyond society's restraints. The accomodation of the realist self to social reality and the romance 'discovery' of an inner self are reinscribed by the existential ego created under the modern imperative of self-definition and self-knowledge.

Victorian England, in this light, becomes a site of inauthenticity. The 'bad faith' induced by the frivolity and pettiness of social taboo and ritual in Lyme Regis is echoed in the 'false consciousness' of an entire nation "governed by the iron laws of convention" (271). The absurdity of an etiquette that demands sexual 'propriety' (to witness Ernestina's coy chasteness and shrinking from sexuality), proper social conduct, even "boredom in company" (100), finds its macrocosm in a world-view moulded by hypocritical Duty, Religion and Morality (chapter thirty-five). In this uncompromising setting, Charles acts as inauthentic man turned existential quester, jolted out of his self-satisfied conformity by Sarah in her role as existential teacher (or Conchis-like Magus), challenging the socio-historic precepts that imprison and restrain.

The narrator, once again, reflexively sets up this discourse, not only classifying characters in terms of an existential hierarchy of authenticity and inauthenticity, but pointing to the false choices and roles that deny such authenticity. In particular, the 'mixed' characters of the realist paradigm are rated according to their ability to resist convention and socially defined behavioural codes. Mrs Poulteney is placed on the negative extreme of the existential scale, acting as a High Priestess of Duty and Morality. Obsessed by received banalities (wryly summed up by the couplet "Dirt and Immorality", 22), her dogma is followed through with such absurd devotion that the narrator impatiently dismisses her as "an epitome of all the most crassly arrogant traits of the ascendant British Empire" (23). The ironically named Ernestina Freeman follows Mrs Poulteney on the scale, for despite her considerable wit, intelligence and incisiveness (displayed at their height in her spirited and sensitive response to the breaking-off of her engagement to Charles), she is blessed with "the favoured feminine look...the demure, the obedient, the shy" (13) and "a very proper respect for convention" (29). Charles's admixture of "one part irony to one part convention" (18) rescues him from existential damnation, however, since his reserves of scientific

scepticism, self-questioning and progressive intelligence make him capable of reform. Despite his "agreeable conformity to the epoch's current" (48), he is able to recognise the "common enemy" (94) of social decorum:

> ...he found English society too hidebound, English solemnity too solemn, English thought too moralistic, English religion too bigoted. (114)

While he plays the role of "Alarmed Propriety" that the narrator alerts us to (127) and frequently lapses into his "conventional side" (125), he is amenable to Sarah's influence and takes up the existential injunctions embodied in her rejection of Victorian social and economic appurtenances:

> I think I have a freedom they cannot understand. No insult, no blame can touch me. Because I have set myself beyond the pale. (153)

Sarah, then, is situated at the opposite end of the scale, personifying an existential inscrutability and mystery, in line with the narrator's claim that he does not 'understand' her (85) and his 'refusal' to enter her consciousness.

The existential action is guided by the narrator who exploits the gap in cognition between himself and his Victorian character. Placing the contemporary "lessons of existential philosophy" (63) at Charles's disposal and supplying him with an "existential terminology" of which he does not have the "benefit" (296), the narrator reflexively sets up explicit existential symbolism. Describing Charles's fossil-hunting activities, he asserts that:

> [Charles] saw in the strata an immensely reassuring orderliness in existence. *He might perhaps have seen a very contemporary social symbolism* in the way those grey-blue ledges were crumbling... (my emphasis, 47)

The ledges, and their corollary, the fossil, come to stand for the erosion of the "fore-doomed" Victorian "attempt to stabilize and fix what is in reality a constant flux" (47) in the face of existential "hazard" and mystery, referring, too, to Charles's own 'fixedness', his membership of a class doomed to extinction by socio-economic evolution. Charles's breakthrough to 'existential consciousness', recognising both this imminent socio-economic demise and the existential 'way out' of it, is continually figured forth in fossil imagery (181, 205, 289).

As existential mouthpiece, the narrator also provides a series of "existentialist moments" unavailable to the Victorian Charles (215) and glosses them with the appropriate existential 'vocabulary'. Charles's encounter with Sarah leaves him "aware of a deprivation" (114):

> His future had always seemed to him of vast potential; and now suddenly it was a fixed voyage to a known place. (114)

He is slow to abandon the stance of a trite "mouther of convention" (67), however, lulled by the dinosaurian temptation of Winsyatt, his anticipated inheritance:

> ...his now certainty of possession of this landscape, all this evoked in Charles that ineffable feeling of fortunate destiny and right order which his stay in Lyme had vaguely troubled. (170)

> Duty – that was his real wife, his Ernestina and his Sarah... (171)

After his disinheritance and the dissipation of his secure social world, a succession of existential insights follow. A "vivid insight, a flash of black lightning" dispels his static misreading of Darwinian theory, placing himself at the apex of an ascending order of "natural selection":

> ...he saw that all life was parallel: that evolution was not vertical, ascending to a perfection, but horizontal. (179)

A final meeting with Sarah on Ware Commons bristles with "existential lessons" and terminology, allowing him to 'see' "the universal parity of existence" (208), "a priority of existence over death, of the individual over the species, of ecology over classification" (209), "universal chaos, looming behind the fragile structures of human order" (209). Mr Freeman's offer of a partnership in his Oxford street store, whose slogan FREEMAN'S FOR CHOICE is a piece of existential irony, provokes yet another crisis moment as Charles "choos[es] to be nothing" over the vulgarities of trade and savours a "last freedom" (256). An encounter with a cockney prostitute, aptly named Sarah,[9] inculcates further 'truths' as Charles 'learns' that human action and choice can keep "The ultimate hell...infinite and empty space... at bay" (278) – an insight that the narrator ironically calls "the very opposite of the Sartrean experience" (278). Since his future (itself a form of "empty space" or "Hazard") involves choice – between Sarah and Ernestina, Victorian Duty and personal freedom – Charles feels "intolerably excited by the proximity of the moment of choice" and experiences "the anxiety of freedom – that is, the realization that one is free and the realization that being free is a situation of terror" (296), a feeling echoed in the "existentialist terror" (324) that "invades" him before he breaks off his engagement to Ernestina. These "fulcrum" moments advise of the reflexive presence of the narrator who must provide the requisite Sartrean lexis to frame such episodes with an existential identity for a character from another century without access to this discourse.

The conventionality of the existentialist discourse and the narrative modes that sustain it is made overt in the maturation of Charles's existential consciousness. Fulfilling his prophecy in chapter thirteen, the narrator apparently withdraws his 'situating', classificatory commentary which is signalled 'over Charles's head' and allows the fledgling ego to approximate a modernist interior monologue. Charles's epiphanic moment, and the existential pivot of the novel, is the "dialogue" of self-realisation between his "better and his worse self" (313) in a church, representing the deep reaches of the psyche in its quest for self-definition. The temporary absence of the narrator, as he predicts in chapter thirteen, marks this as an existential mode of representation as the self moves towards full consciousness in its detachment from social institutions. As such, the novel gestures towards the play with unconsciousness or with various psychological states endemic to modernist absurd fiction which attempts to explore the "idea that reality and knowledge are limited to what the mind can make of personal experience" (Rothblatt, 355). In so doing, the novel ironises the narrative positions of the modern existential novel, tracing its traditional steps:

> The novel describes the crashing absurdity that comes into the life of its protagonist as one by one the institutions that give support and meaning to him fall away. The hero becomes an anti-hero who must pick his way through unforeseen disappointments, somehow finding purpose in his experiences. (Rothblatt, 353)

From a socially adjusted personality, Charles becomes "The lonely, embittered, estranged man of feeling and intelligence, alienated from himself and from society [who] has long been a stock figure of literature" (Rothblatt, 353). However, in so doing, Charles must be moved out of Victorian novel conventions into a modern frame which "gives Smithson tools for understanding himself not available to other Victorians" (McGregor, 40). Fowles own comments in this regard are telling:

> [Victorian men] were victims of external conventions and they hadn't the methods of discourse; they hadn't the philosophies...to live as we do now. They didn't have internal dialogues with themselves as we can do now because of Freud and all the things that have happened in our century. (in Gilder, 40)

Cast as modern, post – Freudian *isolato* – "he was the outcast, the not like other men" (366) – Charles anachronistically anticipates the protagonists of Sartre, Camus and Conrad, among other practitioners of the modern existential novel. By setting up the impossible: an 1867 anti-hero racked with existentialist doubt, able to "admit the desires banned by the public mind"

(154) of his time, even to fulfil them in an explosive "ninety second" (304) sexual encounter, the narrator is able to 'place' and foreground the modern procedures – narrative stance, anti-bowdlerising code, plot, characterisation – which, in fact, make this existential narrative available.

Thus, if the Victorian narrator is a front for an existential creator who shows up the static conventions of nineteenth century novel style, there lurks yet another narrator, a postmodern narrator, who is able to lay bare the conventionality of 'modern' representation. As a "self-parody", the novel provides an editorial on all its narrative stances, including that of the modern 'absconded' author who relinquishes the privilege of direct intervention in order to "show" his fictional world. The existential desire to refine the God-like narrative perspective out of the fictional world is given the lie by the paradox of a narrator who claims that the novel germinates out of his imagination alone *and* wishes to assert the work's autonomy.

As such, the irony of chapter thirteen is by no means at the expense of Victorian practice. As Lodge suggests, postmodernism (as its name implies) is "often as critical of modernism, as it is of anti-modernism" (1977b, 220). Since *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is both "pseudo-Victorian and, curiously, pseudo-modern" (Hagopian, 195), its ironies are directed simultaneously at the omniscient Victorian narrator and at the "omni-ignorant" (Brantlinger, 343) existential narrator (an offshoot of the modernist narrator). Determined to make his presence felt, the Victorian narrator attests to his power over the events and characters of his novel world. As Jane Austen "*made*" (12) Louisa Musgrove fall down a flight of steps in *Persuasion*, so this narrator has complete control. He is able to 'know' Charles more intimately than he 'knows' himself:

> *Charles did not know it*, but in those brief poised seconds above the waiting sea, in that luminous evening silence broken only by the waves' quiet wash, the whole Victorian Age was lost. (my emphasis, 66)

> He associated such faces with foreign women – to be frank *(much franker than he would have been to himself)* with foreign beds. (my emphasis, 105)

He is even able to share Charles's correspondence with us (281), to provide us with a "brief specimen" (365) of his poetry, to arrange Sarah in "the first feminine gesture I have permitted her" (242), to deviate from the novel's "reality" to consider alternative possibilities:

> Let us imagine the impossible, that Mrs Poulteney drew up a list of for and againsts on the subject of Sarah. (51)

and to forward the plot – " But let us leave Sam and Mary... and return to the scarlet-faced Charles" (222). This is matched by the existential narrator whose attempt "to report only the outward facts" (87) and desist from complete knowledge of the novel world is ironised in his suggestion that he "do[es] not know" (117) whether Mary and Sam met under clandestine circumstances, that he "no more intend[s] to find out what was going on in [Sarah's] mind" (243) in Exeter than "on that other occasion when her eyes welled tears in the silent night of Marlborough House" (243) and that he is uncertain about Mary's knowledge – "I am ver...I am sure the young woman...had never heard of Catullus" (358).

Rather than answering Sartre's call for a literature of "subjective realism" (1950, 228) which waives the controlling and selecting faculty of the "God-playing" author, the novel confirms the spuriousness of attempts to "drive the author from the house of fiction" (Booth, 16).[10] It thereby attests to the rhetorical nature of all authorial "disguises" (Booth,20), from the intrusive omniscient narrator to the 'silenced' modern narrator who suggests that his/her view is no longer absolute. As Booth indicates, even if all overt forms of the author's voice are expunged, "what we have left will reveal to us a shameful artificiality" (20), a point ratified by the novel's self-reflexive disclosure of the artifice at the base of the existential discourse. Since choice underlies every facet of the novel genre, "the line between showing and telling is always to some degree arbitrary" (Booth, 20). The claims for "the miraculous superiority of modern fiction" (Booth, 26), thus, tend to break down in view of its status as "rhetoric". In this light, 'realism' can hardly be the prerogative of nineteenth century fiction. As Martin claims, "...every modernism is realistic, whether a material or a mental sphere is its privileged locus of reality" (148). The history of novel forms is the substitution of one kind of fabrication for another and "[the novelist] ends up serving the same old wine in new bottles" (Kaminsky, 229), whether the commitment is to an apparently meaningful, substantial reality or an apparently disordered and ambiguous universe.

The postmodern metacommentary goes beyond Booth's notion of "rhetoric", understood as the rhetorical means whereby an author "tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader" (Preface), however, by suggesting that "rhetoric" is conventional rather than personal. While Fowles may "appear to come out squarely on the side of modernity at

least as far as storytelling is concerned (Scruggs, 96), the novel's "self-parody" infiltrates its modern existential dimension suggesting that it, too, is a means of representation, among others.

This is displayed in the opening lines of chapter thirteen which overtly ironise the modernist aesthetic which promulgates the fictional work as autotelic, free-floating creative construct (85). Eschewing the notion of an autonomous, self-contained modernist imagination, chapter thirteen serves to 'shackle' creativity within the confines of pre-fabricated novel forms. The Victorian and existential narrative stances are conventions, setting up particular positions in relation to 'knowing' the fictional *histoire*. If the omniscient narrator "pretends to stand next to God" (85) and know "[his] character's minds and innermost thoughts" (85), the existential narrator "signs an agreement with [the reader] not to know everything. He reminds [the reader] from time to time that he cannot, in this particular instance, "go behind" because of the convention he has adopted" (Booth, 53). Since these "disguises" are, in both cases, pretences – the chanelling of narrative power and control along conventionalised routes – it seems absurd to claim that the Victorian mode has a premium on such power and control, exerting an authoritarian, if craftily concealed, force. The existential discourse, alongside its realist and romance ancestors, is revealed as a narrative code, a set of devices, a mode of consciousness.

The French Lieutenant's Woman, thus, uses its self-directed parodic frame to situate or contextualise literary production within an historical genealogy of generic conventions. As Burden asserts, parody "may be used to stress that language, literary form, themes and motifs regularly come to the writer in, so to speak, second-hand form" (1979, 135), a point validated by the novel which reflexively appropriates the typified forms, themes and symbols of realist, romance and existential narratives. If the novel reveals the indivisibility of succeeding novel paradigms, displayed in a *discours* which is continually reworked rather than superseded, it also carves out the differences between historical models as "each phase of culture recombin[es] the elements we find in narrative to suit its own ends, to answer its own questions, and to reflect its own emphases and values" (Siegle, 176). This recognition of the historicity of literary production does not simply reduce fictional works to an "echo-chamber of intertextuality" (Tallis, 73) since it serves not to *deny* but to *situate* creativity, to inscribe the imagination within the conventional parameters in which fiction operates, ranging from historically produced

genres to the material conventions (paragraphs, chapters, punctuation) which delimit literary activity (143, 374). As the novel reflexively indicates, borrowing from "someone else's imagination" (264) can be a fruitful creative process.

In this light, there are grounds for interpreting chapter thirteen in terms other than that of a reductive Victorian/modern, repressive/liberatory dichotomy. For the existential narrator, the problem of freedom is paramount as he contemplates a series of impossible liberations in keeping with his "new theological image" (85): how to dispel his control over his "puppet-like" creations (85), how to respect his characters' 'privacy' since "possibility is not permissibility" (85) and how to shelve his "quasi-divine" (86) plans for the work and allow for his characters' disobedience and autonomy. While we cannot (and are not meant to) take these claims at face value, the postmodern self-contextualisation of the novel does create a basis from which they may be read as more than "arrant sophistry" (Eddins, 218). Since characters are created from a narrative *langue* and a set of generic rules, the narrator-author indeed does not "fully control these creatures of my mind" (87). As Hutcheon explains:

> ...there is a certain inner logic, or motivation, which comes with the process of creating the novelistic universe and which makes imperious demands upon the novelist, forcing him to abandon any plans conceived *before* putting pen to paper. (1980, 58)

These "imperious demands" are to follow the "inner logic" of the conventional historical repertoires – plot requirements, character consistency, appropriate imagery – with which the novelist works, and which the novel makes visible in a postmodern way. Charles's 'disobedience' when he refuses to walk back to Lyme Regis and "gratuitously" (86) turns back to go to the dairy is explicable in terms of his partial constructions as romance hero, taking on traditional generic attitudes and postures. After all, when the narrator tells us that Charles's "mind worked" through "mixed metaphors" (164) and that his heavy-handed use of exclamation marks approximates Charles's state ("...thoughts, reactions, reactions to reactions spurted up angrily thus in his mind", 181), he reminds us not only that 'Charles' consists of 'words on a page' mediated by a narrative voice but that he is located within a particular narrative code with a specific set of markers. Similarly, while the speculation about Sarah's independence may alert us to the fact that a character in an imaginative construct has no autonomy, the postmodern situating of creation means that in the "context of my book's reality" (85), the narrator must 'allow'

her to behave in accordance with the demands made on her by her position within the existential discourse:

> I know in the context of my book's reality that Sarah would never have brushed away her tears and leant down and delivered a chapter of revelation. She would instantly have turned, had she seen me there just as the old moon rose, and disappeared into the interior shadows. (85)

As existential 'enigma', Sarah must retain her aloofness and mystery.[11] Thus, as a meditation on different narrative conventions, ploys and techniques – old and contemporary – chapter thirteen does deliver a limited freedom by suggesting that the 'power' of the novel resides in its conventionalised, arbitrary and, ultimately, fragile means of representation.[12]

Unlike *The Collector* where tension arises from the degree to which authorial discourse and existentialism coincide, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* achieves a genuine heteroglossia in which "two epochs...come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance" (Bakhtin, 360). By "re-accentualising" (Bakhtin, 119) a Victorian mode in the context of a modern poetics, "the language being used to illuminate another language...is reified to the point where it itself becomes an image of a language" (361). This is an accurate description of the contemporary existential 'language' of the novel which cannot consequently function as "unconditional discourse spoken with no qualifications or distancing" (Bakhtin, 322). At this level, the novel creates a resistance to "other directed" parody and literally has "no "own word" " (Bakhtin, 309).

iv

If The French Lieutenant's Woman accepts the "alternative world" notion of art proposed by *The Magus*, granting it the capacity to " "recompose" the conventional concepts of reality against which it lodges its own" (Siegle, 170), it nonetheless suggests that fiction is regulated and conditioned by that reality, resulting in the production of temporally determined, historically specific narrative modes. Much of the narrative energy in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, therefore, is devoted to establishing the 'reality behind the fiction', a reality itself informed by the interchange between the real referent and the textuality needed to mediate it ("Fiction is woven into all", as the narrator puts it, 87). The novel, then, clearly does not follow the favoured "post-Saussurean" trend of the bracketed referent, claiming that the real inheres only in a differential system of signifiers and signifieds

rather than in a world 'out there'. If it deals primarily with "human and social reality – reality that is first and foremost linguistic and discursive, reality experienced in and through discourse" (McHale, 165), it does not perforce efface the referent since:

> Historiographic metafiction both underlines its existence as discourse and yet still posits a relation of reference (however problematic) to the historical world, both through its assertion of the social and institutional nature of all enunciative positions and through its grounding in the representational. (Hutcheon, 1988, 141)

The etymological history of the word "blackmail" (182) illustrates this grounding of language/discourse in concrete historical and social conditions, as do the the shifting meanings of the terms "common" (80) and "cad" (291) which point to the sliding of signifieds in respose to social formations that condition them. Mrs Poulteney's use of the by now innocuous word "'person', as two patriotic Frenchmen might have said 'Nazi' during the occupation" (92) makes much the same point. Thus, if the novel acknowledges the ubiquitousness of texts, it reserves a space outside of them. While its primary reference is to the systems of signification and articulation from which it is constructed, it does invoke a physical phenomenal world. The steps of Lyme Quay exist outside of Jane Austen's novel, as they do outside Fowles's novel. The Ware Commons the narrator so lovingly describes may indeed be found in the world 'out there' if we consult a map or take a trip to Lyme Regis. The novel also appeals to non-textualised biological, sexual drives and material phenomena (time and space). To suggest that such "rock bottom" realities are differently punctuated and categorised by participants of different cultures is not to deny them anything other than an idealised existence but to question a correspondence theory that would posit a pre-constructed reality transparently and readily available to consciousness.

The juxtaposition of two centuries and their respective 'realities' allows the novel to line up the codes through which reality is perceived and through which meaning is granted at different temporal junctures. Thus, it reflexively reveals the "specifically discursive qualities of sexuality, aesthetics, theology, science and history" (Siegle, 180). These emerge as human constructs existing in time, rather than immutable, and neutral, 'givens'.

Concepts of time and space, for instance, are shown to be differently encoded and perceived. Victorian expansiveness – "...the time-signature over existence was firmly adagio" (15) – is matched by contemporary hurriedness

which, the narrator assures us, would have "astounded" (15) Charles, given the contemporary devotion to "finding faster ways of doing things" (15), as opposed to the Victorian habit of "spinning out what one to did to occupy the vast colonnades of leisure available" (16). Charles's Victorian apprehension of the "edificiality of time, in which inexorable laws...very conveniently arranged themselves for the survival of the fittest and the best" (47) is confronted by a contemporary (existential) lack of faith in the ordering provided by time and laws – both human and divine. Perceptions of space are also counterpointed: the Victorian world which was neither "only a push or switch away" (115) nor "bridgeable by radio, television, cheap travel" (115) allowed for a considerably more expansive notion of space and, hence, a greater sense of isolation (glossed by the existential narrator as a greater sense of 'mystery' – "an exciting beautiful strangeness", 115).

A comparison of modes of sexuality clinches the postmodern historicity of the novel. Informing us that the Victorian era witnessed "an enormous progress and liberation in every other field of activity; and nothing but tyranny in the most personal and fundamental" (232), the narrator qualifies this by conceding that the Victorians were "quite as highly sexed as our own century" (232). Instead of modern prurience where "we have sex thrown at us night and day" (232), the Victorians chose "not to talk openly about sex" (233). These contrasting modes of sexuality are, however, "mere conventions" (233). As the narrator concedes:

> ...it seems very far from sure that the Victorians did not experience a much keener, because less frequent, sexual pleasure than we do; and that they were not dimly aware of this, and so *chose a convention of suppression, repression and silence* to maintain the keenness of the pleasure. (my emphasis, 234)

By contrast, the modern convention of "transferring to the public imagination what [the Victorians] left to the private" (234) may have destroyed "so much of the mystery, the difficulty, the aura of the forbidden...also a great deal of the pleasure" (234). Similar historical juxtapositions are made in the novel with regard to "the use of clothes, the concept of duty, views of religion, notions of the "gentleman", modes of thinking and perceiving, attitudes towards possessions and so on" (Gross, 24). This give-and-take version of cultural history is premised on the existence of a "human constant" (233), a substantive matrix of reality, chanelled into historically specific discursive frames: "the difference is a vocabulary, a degree of metaphor". (233)

This temporal scheme is continually placed in the evolutionary perspective which forms a thematic backdrop in the novel. Indeed, critics of the novel have often interpreted its presentation of social and literary change in evolutionary terms: Scruggs, for example, claims that "Fowles is interested in how the Victorian world evolved into the modern one" (98), an opinion shared by Costa, "*The French Lieutenant's Woman* instructs us imaginatively in the ways nineteenth century man became twentieth" (9). However, the valuation of different centuries in terms of their conventional semiotic properties disallows a schema of evolution that would equate it with progress. In tracing the history of the "gentleman" from the "parfit knights and *preux chevaliers* of the Middle Ages" through to the modern "scientist" (256), the narrator asserts that :

> Death is not in the nature of things; it is the nature of things.
> But what dies is the form. The matter is immortal. (256)

His record of "superseded forms" (256) is a record of the discursive systems that have constituted 'reality' at different historical moments. The modern scientist is "but one more form" (257), rather than the summit of the evolutionary process, pointing to the codified nature of modern reality and prefiguring its supersession. Theology (as it transmutes into science), too, is teasingly submitted as a succession of 'myths' which affect the conceptualisation of the 'real', ranging from Archbishop Usher's claim "recorded solemnly in countless editions of the official English Bible" that "the world had been created at nine o'clock on October 26th, 4004 B. C.", to Buffon's "explosion" of that "myth" by "pushing back "the origin of the world "some 75, 000 years", to Lyell's "Principles of Geology" which "hurled it back millions" and gave the Victorian age "the most meaningful space" (140).[13] Thus, the narrator permits a glimpse of the "absences and differences" (Gross, 23) that mark out past from present, resisting a polemical critique of either age. As the narrator warns us, "we are not the ones who will finally judge" (46), nor should we "confuse progress with happiness" (132). This is because historical change is "stylistic, or conventional" (Siegle, 178), refracted through the expressive conventions available at different historical stages which provide possibilities for and shape meaning.

Mindful that reality is encoded by language, the narrator constructs a socially generated *langue* of 1867. Compiling a Victorian dictionary of "capitalised ghosts" (87) – Duty, Morality and Propriety – which add up to a Victorian public moral discourse, the narrator adduces the Victorian 'nouns',"earnestness, moral rectitude, probity" (20). Further 'material' for

this project comes to light in a popular text of the period, The Lady of La Garaye – "...a pure, tender, touching tale of pain, sorrow, love, duty, piety and death" (100) – which provides " as pretty a string of *key mid-Victorian adjectives and nouns* as one could ever hope to light on" (my emphasis, 100).

Assimilated into this anatomy of Victorian expressive apparatus is an exploration of the syntactic and stylistic tendencies of the Victorian mind:

> ...the Victorians were not a dialectically minded age: they did not think in opposites, of positives and negatives as aspects of the same whole. Paradoxes puzzled rather than pleased them. (215)

Thus, the unequivocal Victorian phrase "I must not" becomes a "private commandment" (30) for Ernestina, silencing the paradox in her "narcissistic self-contemplation" (29) with its sexual undertones and her simultaneous disgust at sexuality with its carnal implications. That "[t]he Victorian was a prolix age; and unaccustomed to the Delphic" (296) explains Charles's long-winded and overwrought descriptions of Sarah. Furthermore, the Victorian "mania for categorization" (319) becomes the bedrock of existential censure and critique while the tendency to have "two minds" (displayed at its most "notorious" in the poets of the epoch – Tennyson, Hardy, Clough) is exploited in the novel's depiction of Charles's split persona as he becomes torn between a determining discourse and personal desire.

However, if temporally conditioned discourse and consciousness are inexorably intertwined, the novel does not simply collapse 'world' into 'language'. A reservoir of 'reality' precedes discourse which serves to maintain and cement particular historical systems of thought (or "realities"). This is illustrated in the novel by the inability to perceive meaning where a relevant term is absent from an epochal 'language'. Thus, Mrs Poulteney would not have been aghast at the sight of Millie and Sarah sleeping in the same bed since she "had never heard of the word lesbian" (137). Lacking a place in language, "some vices were then so unnatural that they did not exist" (137). It is Sarah's "directness of thought and language" (159) – her displacement of standard expressive conventions – that creates her mystery for Charles. He cannot conceive of her imaginative nature and can only "dimly" perceive her passion, since these "two qualities" were "banned by the epoch" (165) and, hence, beyond his conceptual and linguistic purview. This implies not that such qualities did not exist during the period but that they were not admitted to operating 'reality' structures. The same is true of Charles's condition as "healthy agnostic" (18), annotated by a footnote which explains that "...he

would not have termed himself so, for the very simple reason that the word was not coined (by Huxley) until 1870 by which time it had become much needed" (18). Indeed, the whole novel is structured on this dialectical interdependence of discourse and reality for while the kind of insight (self-questioning, loss of faith in social formations) we now term 'existential' may have been manifested in various ways throughout the ages, it was only in the twentieth century that it was given a label, a language and, consequently, a place in 'reality', so that it has come to be seen as a modern phenomenon. Indeed, as McGregor claims, the Victorian "was unaware of such a credo" (39), suggesting that, if similar questions about existence were posed in the nineteenth century, "the literature of the age does not [or cannot] reveal it in existential terms" (39), a factor Fowles exploits in his play on historically specific frames of understanding.

However, if the *langue* of 1867 provides a "common landscape of knowledge, a community, with a known set of rules and attached meanings" (132) shaping subjective consciousness, the Victorian world is shown to be "not quite as homogeneous as its surface" (Rackham, 99). As Scruggs importantly notes:

> Fowles does not show us a Victorian world that is stable but only one that looks stable. In 1867, the Victorian world is at high tide but contains within it new energies and ideas that will tear it apart...(98)

The discrepancies and contradictions at the heart of the Victorian public discourse are memorably captured in chapter thirty-five where the sanctity of women and marriage and the propriety of sexual mores (proclaimed graphically in the multitude of churches built during the period and maintained linguistically through religious and "public utterance") are belied by the prostitution of young girls, the proliferation of brothels and the "scandalous private lives" led by "great public figures" (231). The flimsiness of public representation is also evinced by the epigraphs which contain the ideological energies of Marx and Darwin whose ideas irrevocably altered Victorian conceptions of reality, as well as by contrasting a relatively stable, homogeneous *langue* with its more piecemeal manifestations in the individual *paroles* employed by the novel's characters which reveal different degrees of adherence to it. In this light, it is only Mrs Poulteney who is hailed into place as the fully finished subject of the Victorian public discourse. Ernestina's "gift of self-contempt" (219) rescues her from such consumerist submission, although her ideological reaction is not "to reject the entire class system"

(219) but "to seek a higher" (219). This is explained by the narrator as a consequence of the discursive determinism to which she is subject: "...she had been hopelessly well trained to view society as so many rungs on a ladder" (219). Nonetheless, Ernestina has "several voices" (219), ranging from a wry self-deprecation to a cloying deference to the patriarchal authority of Man and God: "She wrote partly for his eyes – as, like every other Victorian woman, she wrote partly for His eyes" (220).

The ideological vigour and diversity of the Victorian age (against a monolithic public/moral discourse) is displayed in Mr Freeman who replaces Mrs Poulteney's Gods of Duty and Morality with the catchwords of capitalist ambition: "Indeed, Profit and Earnestness (in that order) might have been his motto" (244). It is this very ideology that attracts Sam, who abandons the station of servitude for an ethos of capitalist individualism (the same ethic that Marx attacks in the epigraphs of the novel). In addition, while Mr Freeman (and Sam) represent the advancement of a particular economic discourse, Dr Grogan captures the intellectual currents of the age, employing a reasoned scientific language which registers the impact of Darwin. As such, the novel invokes a fluctuating and heterogeneous ideological world: "It was such an age of change! So many orders beginning to melt and dissolve" (285). While Charles thrives by "cryptic coloration, survival by learning to blend with one's surroundings- with the unquestioned assumptions of one's age or social caste" (127), we are told that he "had more than one vocabulary":

> With Sam in the morning, with Ernestina across a gay lunch, and here in the role of Alarmed Propriety ... he was almost three different men ...(127)

The narrator's aside – "...and there will be others of him before we are finished" (127) – presages Charles's abandonment of the Victorian roles of employer, fiancé and model of decorum, as he is positioned by the narrator in anachronistic frames which allow for the considerably different ethical and linguistic commitment demanded by the existential consciousness. In this way, the novel does not posit a rigid determinism whereby subjects are lined up at the behest of an inevitable discursive and linguistic structuration. Rather, it portrays a world where "language is worked by ideological practices: riddled with styles, rhetorics and 'ways of speaking' " (Coward and Ellis, 79).

A further irony pervades the novel's 1867 *langue/parole* reconstruction, for it reflexively and, postmodernly, reveals that, while it is able to act as an exposé of the Victorian Age – its merits and limitations – it too is a *parole*, a

selective construction of the Victorian Age. Written from a contemporary perspective, it can only provide for *our* view of the Victorians since imaginative entry into the past is limited by the conventions – expressive and discursive – of a twentieth century standpoint. The narrator insists on the modernity of the novel's outlook and its conformity to current perceptions of Victorian England. Thus, "Duty" is described as "a key concept in *our* understanding of the Victorian Age" (30) and Charles's cumbersome hiking equipment prompts the comment that "Nothing is more incomprehensible to *us* than the methodicality of the Victorians" (45). Acknowledging our temporal immersion, the narrator exposes the inevitability of imposing a modern mental map on historical material: "A thought has swept into your mind; but you forget we are in the year 1867" (137). While much of his narrative effort is directed at situating Charles and his modes of perception within Victorian parameters (63, 154, 195, 307), the novel admits that its attempt to structure "the whole age itself" (236) is inevitably saturated by modern pre-conceptions and standards.

Indeed, it caters to a popularised, if not vulgarised, view of Victorian social reality. While Hutcheon makes the valid claim that the paratexts (epigraphs, footnotes and incorporated documents) in the novel serve to "direct the reader to a specific, real historical context within (or against) which the fictive universe operates", thereby preventing "any tendency on the part of the reader to universalise and eternalise – that is, to dehistoricise" (1989, 86), it is equally necessary to take heed of Fowles's remark in his Preface where he concedes that his knowledge of the "reality behind [his] fiction" is gleaned from a collection of popular sources. In this light, the "specific, real historical context" of the novel is shown to be partisan, provisional and coloured by the interests and prejudices of modern anthologists. As Siegle remarks, "...our understanding of an age depends upon which texts we canonize" (186). An essay by Fowles, similarly, asserts that the novel attempts to "agree with *our* psychological picture of the Victorians" (1977, 139). Consequently:

> ...the novel's literary self-consciousness enables [the reader] to see that the apparently solid, historically accurate evocation of the Victorian age is as much a product of our collective imagination as it of fact. (Holmes, 1981, 187)

Or, to put it in a postmodern perspective, the novel demonstrates the way in which 'fact' coincides with the "collective imaginations" operating at different time-periods. In constructing a version of Victorian historical reality that assents to a modern "collective imagination", the novel "sensationalises our

relations with the received notions of Victorian sexuality" (Conradi, 62) and plays on our tendency to construct the past as "romanticised and archaic ideation" (Eddins, 219) by pandering to modern conceptions of Victorian repression and prudery. However, this occurs within a postmodern recognition that, despite its ability to highlight a Victorian world that is "not nearly as conventional" (Rackham, 99) as an ironised modern outlook would have it, the novel equally participates in the version of history constructed by a "gullible posterity" (319) which subscribes to essentially middle-class estimations of the past:

> The vast majority of witnesses and reporters, in every age, belong to the educated class; and this has produced, throughout history, a kind of minor distortion of reality. The prudish puritanity *we* lend to the Victorians and rather lazily apply to all classes of Victorian society, is in fact a middle-class view of the middle-class ethos. (my emphasis, 234)

The collective "we" of this statement implies that the novel itself is no less guilty of ideologically and temporally-loaded historical reconstruction (despite its attempt to render a fuller, redemptive picture of the past).

While a "century of hindsight gives [the narrator] an elevation beyond that of any godlike pre-Jamesian narrator" (McEwan, 25), this hindsight is also seen to condition and limit the narrator's knowledge of the Victorian world. In Eddins's words, " his apparent near-omniscience cannot tell him with certainty what a given Victorian character would have done in a given set of circumstances" (219). Kellman's claim that "Fowles's narrator perpetually flaunts his autonomy from time, his ability to move freely back and forth through history" (163) may be balanced by Siegle's postmodern counter-claim that "[h]imself within the modern discursive frame, [the narrator] can neither mediate between the two frames, as he appears to do, nor give us a necessarily true or Victorian way of seeing nineteenth-century subject matter" (179). While the narrator may, in postmodern fashion, appropriate past conventions and masquerade in typified narratorial masks, he is nonetheless constrained by his twentieth-century location. And, if he can violate temporal and narratorial bounds and enter his character's world, there is no level at which he can communicate with them, as witnessed in his occupation of Charles's train-compartment where the relations of modern narrator and Victorian character are still tacitly observed.

Thus, as an allegory of interpretation, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is able to ironise the existential modern frame and, simultaneously, retain it

as a preferred discourse.[14] Since meaning is constructed within current conventional frameworks, the novel foregrounds the tendency to "make sense of change by valorising the present" (Siegle, 179), equating 'modern' with progressive. Siegle attributes this to "the error of one period's judging of another" which "lies in assuming its own discursive conventions are "right", "natural" – that is, nondiscursive, and therefore normative" (179) – or, at any rate, more rational and knowledgeable. The novel displays evidence of this "complacency at being modern" (Adam, 347). The revisionary modern voice tends to over-stress the compulsions of Victorian Duty and the repressiveness of sexual chastity, seeks to correct Charles's Victorian world-view with existential ethics ("His statement to himself *should* have been..., 63) and even calls the Victorian lexis "misleading" (20). However, the narrator's explanation of "why his characters are Victorian and we are not" (Rothblatt, 348) is conducted within an awareness of "the desolating arrogance of contemporary man" (139). As Brantlinger comments, "Under the guise of an interpretation of the Victorian age, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is really a myth for now" (340), revealing how historical meaning is created by and through the modern "myth of the overthrow of 'Victorianism'" (Brantlinger, 340) in favour of existential enlightenment. While the modern suspicion of external foundations for meaning makes Duty a "wet blanket" (30), the narrator suggests that our "ritual exorcism of Duty and Work and Chastity" (Brantlinger, 340) is incomplete. "We meet here, once again," , he concedes, "this bone of contention between the two centuries: is duty to drive us or not?" (45). Nor, for that matter, have we laid the ghost of Morality to rest, as the smug, didactic existential voice indicates. Thus, while existential liberation acts as the pivot to mark out past from present (hence creating ethical-thematic meaning in the novel), it does not enjoy an uncontested place at the apex of the discursive hierarchy, owing to the postmodern irony which both allows for and "denaturalises" its meaning. By recoding Victorian reality in the light of a modern idiom, existentialism serves as an explanatory overlay which is paradoxically both validated and ironised by its temporal specificity.[15]

This historical hermeneutics is equally pertinent to the construction of literary history in the novel. As with its retrieval of Victorian social reality, it recuperates what is ultimately *our* version of the Victorian novel. As a pastiche of Victorian conventions, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* lumps together an assortment of typified features corresponding to archetypal conceptions of Victorian practice. Its 'restoration' of an older genre is, thus,

simultaneously a 'reification' of its conventional properties. Literary genre hence becomes an "empty form" (Culler, 1983b, 68) which negotiates with its historical audience. Since "audience perception [is] controlled by the conventions for the representation of reality within art and society" (Levine, 236), the novel prefigures its misreading by a modern audience with certain expectations of the generic and mimetic contract of the Victorian narrative mode. Indeed, the novel is a "Victorian novel no Victorian could have written" (qtd. in McEwan, 23) since it submits to a stereotyped Victorian 'recipe' that, at times, belies the complexity of 'real' Victorian novels. However, unlike Belsey who uses her exceedingly narrow definition of "classic realism", with its alleged features of "Illusionism, closure and a hierarchy of discourse" (70), to discredit nineteenth century fiction, the novel is aware that any definitions of literary genre (and, in its own case, a deliberately parodied definition), "however useful they may be locally, correspond to ideas rather than to novels" (Levine, 242)

As an "elegant endeavour at assessing the mental distance that must lie between a modern reader and a fiction of that sort" (Bradbury, 260), the novel exposes the tendency to regard (or make 'sense' of) Victorian fiction as a quaint story of pronounced cause and effect leading to a sensible moral message and, by extension, as a hopelessly out-of-date, authoritarian and uncritical affair which must make way for modern experiment. This attitude to the literary past, accusing it of adhering to ideas of naive and uncritical correspondence, is, however, a function of modern critical apparatus. Indeed, the novel makes it clear that, as we read in terms of modernist form and pattern, so we read in terms of the mimetic content, cause and effect and moral meaning which have been declared the province of nineteenth century literary practice. As McEwan puts it, "...we are left with our need for the novel and its moral, humanist dimension" (36). This need is supplied by the (ironised) existential discourse which aspires to be the 'moral meaning' of the novel, reached by the same "chains of cause and effect", the same desire "for positive all-explaining theories, carefully studied and studiously applied" (215) attributed to a repressive Victorian mind-set.

The narrator, as modern voice, ostensibly shares in the condemnation of Victorian cultural forms for their unprogressive nature (and their 'naturalisation' of a repressive bourgeois ideology, evinced in "enveloping, mummifying clothes" and "narrow-windowed and -corridored architecture" designed to "Hide reality, shut out nature", 154). His declaration that "Each age, each

guilty age, builds high walls around its Versailles; and I personally hate those walls most when they are made by art and literature" (138) may be taken as the basis of his existential censure of Victorian art for its silence about sexuality and for its middle-class world views, parodied in the throwaway Victorian ending "which cannot be bothered about the biography of servants" (292) and in the sentimentalised portrayals of the servant-class by "bourgeois novelists" (41). However, this position is ironised by the force of historical discursivity whereby the silences, denials, resistances and taboos of Victorian discourse are shown to derive from available conceptual conventions (with which writers such as Hardy and Mill struggled but which they could not overcome).[16] Furthermore, the progressive values 'missing' from Victorian fiction are, themselves, projected onto the literary past by modern discursive notions of 'what the novel should be'.

Thus, as Waugh observes, " *The French Lieutenant's Woman* ...rewrites the Victorian realist novel and the historical romance but also explicitly offers *itself* as one out of many possible versions" (69). Its postmodern self-parody comes to the fore in its refusal of the possibility of a metalanguage: a transcendent, descriptive analysis of the Victorian age and its fiction. Instead, it admits its implication in the tangle of languages, ideologies and conventions of the modern period which inevitably flavour its commentaries. While it cannot escape this entailment, it can forecast its own 'revision' or obsolescence. Thus, the present is 'frozen' in the novel, participating in an evolutionary schema that predicts its conventionality and in-built historicity. As Bergonzi notes, " The French *Lieutenant's Woman* may aquire yet a further dimension of historicity as 1969 ceases to indicate the present and becomes itself part of the past" (55). If existential choice is valorized as a new world paradigm and a preferred model of human conduct and novel-writing, choice also "means creating a new context for human action that inevitably with time, becomes restrictive and institutionalised. In short, the brave new world soon become the established order" (Scruggs, 110). As such, the novel presents itself as potential target or model to be rewritten and transformed, containing the seeds of its own extinction. While flattering modern myths carve out enclaves of meaning for distinguishing between past and present, the novel is overt about its "historical misinformation" (Todd, 113), thereby disturbing our ready acceptance of current, and naturalised, sense-making equipment. While showing the operation of our discursive notions of " Time, Progress, Society, Evolution and all those other capitalised ghosts in the

night..." (87), as they affect our construction of the past – both social and literary – the novel will not allow us (or itself) to settle into them uncritically.

In so doing, the novel defines itself as a fragile sociolect, taking up the positions permitted by its age which allow for sense-making, yet are charged with provisionality and, in the case of the resurrection of Victorian fiction and reality, possible unreliability. The disjunctions between past and present feed into a postmodern sense of the way in which past is processed through 'presentist' modes of experiencing and perceiving. As Fowles himself has commented, "A serious novelist should not pretend to live in 1867; he must remember that a novel is new, that its primary reference is to the writer's present" (in Foulkes, 383). As a kind of historiography, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* reveals that history-making itself is an interpretative act, immersed in temporally defined discursive systems.[17] The novel's strong historical consciousness allows for a sense of the selective bias at work in the explanatory existential framework used in the narrator's attempt to relay Victorian reality in a modern age. If, as Hayden White claims, the production and consumption of historical accounts are filtered through a demand for closure, which is a "demand...for moral meaning" (24), teleology, causality, coherence and closure are provided in the novel through the 'moral' apparatus of existential philosophy which is shown to be an instrument of contemporary sense-making rather than a definitive 'explanation'.[18]

Thus, if the novel postmodernly proposes fictionality/narrativity *per se* as the only viable point of reference, it also problematises the relation of texts to a real referent. As in *The Magus* where Conchis presents Nicholas with the twentieth century as a collection of texts shaped by 'real' (historical) events, the narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* stalks the Victorian past through an archive of social, cultural and literary intertexts. His compendium of Victorian cultural and social history directs us to fiction (Dickens, Hardy, the mildly pornographic "History of the Human Heart") and to real historical records (the trial of Emile de la Ronciere, "Mayhew, the great Commission Reports and the rest",234). As stand-ins for the past, such documents are our only means of knowing it, yet none can be the "real reality". The Victorian age *really* existed but the novel questions its ability to know and analyse it accurately since it is an "after-trace" (Fowles, in Foulkes, 379) available only at a discursive remove through textualised remains which are, in turn, overlaid by the conventional frameworks of the modern (interpreting) consciousness.

The novel's "self-conscious investigation of the relationships between conventions of writing, social realities and the historical process" (Burden, 1979, 136) converges on its multiple endings, presenting a Victorian realist accommodation to social convention in Charles's imagined reconciliation with Ernestina, a romance reintegration of inner self and social forms in the reunion of Charles, Sarah and their baby daughter and an appropriately bleak existential ending where Charles rejects Sarah's offer of a platonic friendship and walks alone along the deserted embankment armed with an "atom of faith in himself" (399) in order to live an authentic life "within our hazard-given abilities" (398).

As the tactic of an existential narrator reluctant to "fix the fight" (348) by the imposition of a 'closed', authorially-determined ending, the endings have been read as an allegory of existential choice, providing the reader with a literal choice of endings and/or infusing a sense of narrative contingency in a refusal to bow to the tyranny of chronology (as it determines an inevitable novelistic ordering).[19] Most commentators, however, have perceived that the fight is indeed "fixed" and that the novel is "persuasively oriented towards the final ending' (Binns, 1973, 331) which constitutes the " 'real' version" (349). This is established both spatially, since Charles's projected ending and the romance ending are clearly not the terminal points of the novel, and thematically, since the formal logic of the novel issues in an existential, 'open' ending. As the narrator himself comments, the Victorian ending is a "betrayal of [Charles's] deeper potentiality" (295), evinced in a parody of the closed Victorian wind-up which reaches savage proportions. The romance ending, while narratorially anticipated in the scene where Charles entertains with his watch-chain the daughter of the prostitute he visits, is also ironised, both in the introduction of Lalage, Charles's daughter, as convenient, arbitrary and unlikely *deus ex machina* brought in by the novelist-god to resolve his plot and by the reflexive reminder of the conventionalised sentimentality of this closing scenario: "...a thousand violins cloy very rapidly without percussion" (393). In this light, the " 'real' realist stance" (D'Haen, 167) is the "thoroughly contemporary final ending" (Huffaker, 108) which is supported by the "vast thematic network which has woven into the novel the concepts of man's isolation and his survival through the centuries by evolving" (108).[20]

A recognition of the postmodern historical frame of the novel, however, enables a restoration of the validity of all three possible endings, while

accepting the preferred status of the final one. Rather than refusing closure, the novel plays on and answers our need for closure, mediated through a foregrounding of the narrative codes that effect it. Its postmodern technique of tying novel conventions to specific socio-historic realities becomes a means of generating *conceptual* closure, anticipating a modern reader who is predisposed to favouring a contemporary ending, employing modern, 'naturalised' narrative devices. At the same time, the novel is able to evade *narrative* closure by suggesting that the 'authority' vested in novel endings is a matter of social and temporal validation (so that a Victorian would have chosen the closed endings that receive such scathing treatment at the hands of the modern narrator).

At this level, the preferred existential discourse is itself clearly offered as a narrative code, among others (and, as such, a 'closed' ending in itself). In opening up Charles's tragedy to a modern context, the novel must "ring with those echoes of James, Conrad and Eliot that we have come to associate with the modern tragic mode" (Evarts, 68). Fowles himself refers to a "late twentieth century convention" whereby "the serious ending must be an unhappy one" (in Gilder, 40). The narrator accordingly brandishes a watch (rather than the flippant coin he tossed in his guise as Victorian novelist) in order to orchestrate a temporally viable ending whose conventions must be obeyed. Arranging for the illusion of his own disappearance and nonintervention by a landau which carries him away, the narrator leaves Charles 'alone' to work out his existential destiny. We are never allowed to forget that this is a conventionalised ploy, however, for the presence of the silenced modern narrator is felt in his characteristic final gesture of refusing to interpret Sarah: "There are tears in her eyes? She is too far away for me to tell" (398). The modern narrator, then, remains as a recoding force, transmuting Victorian material by a set of modern narrative devices.

The ultimate effect of the historicising of novel production and consumption is to suggest that novel endings and novel 'truths' are "anything but neutral, however aestheticised" (Hutcheon, 1989, 3).[21] Rather than condemning Victorian practice or deferentially installing it (as some critics have claimed),[22] *The French Lieutenant's Woman* serves to condition our acceptance of the moral meaning that, as Hayden White claims, lies at the heart of all narrative. The deconstruction of the notion that the reader is "responding in a morally engaged way to serious human concerns" (Holmes, 1981, 187) applies equally to existential moral lore which is itself shown to be a

discourse rather than a fixed origin or centre, based on such metaphysical fundamentals as subjectivity, consciousness and "man". Victorian and modern modes of representation, then, are equally valid modes of knowing, if equally provisional.

Thus, while the novel answers our nostalgia for origins and meaning, it also "pokes fun at its own ethical commitment" (Binns, 1973, 321) by inverting the signifier-signified bifurcation in order to reveal how meanings are contextually produced. Thus, it temporarily suspends freeplay to display how signifiers become signifieds *and* restores that freeplay in the historical sliding of signifieds in the process of meaning-making.[23]

V

As the investigation of novel conventions leads into a notion of postmodern 'reality' which is itself mediated by temporal symbol-making systems, so the reflexive examination of the novel's 'subjects' – characters, the author and the reader – leads to the replacement of the humanist monadic ego by a situated subject who is irretrievably implicated in available discursive systems. Thus, subjectivity in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is conceived in terms of "...the absolute and intimate connection between ourselves as speakers and our socially determined patterns of perceiving, thinking, expressing and acting" (Russell, 190).

The imputation of free will to the characters in chapter thirteen serves to problematise the notion of the free-standing character whose unity of development grants a life-like and seeming self-sufficiency. Indeed, the figure of Mrs Poulteney whose referentiality is exploited, so much so that the narrator is able to scrutinise the "Bosch-like" vagaries of her subconscious (82), violates the boundaries that make a character 'knowable' and, hence, credible. The narrator proverbially 'knows too much about her'. Charles, conversely, is set up as the paradigm of the consistent, 'developing' character able 'to walk off the page'. Not only are we thoroughly informed of his appearance, background, tastes and habits by the over-zealous Victorian voice but he is also allowed to 'show himself' in modern fashion through recourse to free indirect discourse and the privilege of being a focaliser whose point of view is filtered through the overriding narrator's perspective. Thus, the apparently autonomous Charles is, in effect, created by a spread of

available modes of characterisation so that he spans both Victorian and modern models of selfhood, projected into literary forms.

However, the technical strategies that underlie Charles's seeming humanity and capacity for free action do not so much destroy the "fiction of selfhood" (Hutcheon, 1988, 159) as confirm the constructed, narrative nature of the subject. The narrator turns to the subjectivity of his readers in chapter thirteen:

> You do not even think of your past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it tinker with it...fictionalise it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf – your book, your romanced autobiography. (87)

This is not merely to suggest that we create illusions about ourselves nor (ridiculously) that we occupy the same status as fictional characters. Cued by the contention that "we [are] all novelists" (294), the novel postmodernly explores "the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past" (Hutcheon, 1989, 7).

Charles's position as the rationally explained, psychologically consistent liberal-humanist, male ego is further ironised and contested by the portrayal of Sarah. As an "unclassifiable" (Lever, 93) character, she is denied the modes of character presentation that create unity, consistency and 'knowability'. She is neither "told", in the sense of a clear establishment of her motivation, psychology and past, nor "shown", since an entry into her consciousness via interior monologue never occurs. Indeed, the novel plays on our need to *construct* 'knowable' characters with whom we may identify sympathetically by sowing misleading clues about Sarah. Her sombre dress, air of bruised sensuality and enigmatic presence, for example, tease us into reading her as 'fallen woman' through most of the novel until the revelation of her 'truth' wrenches this identity from us, reconstructing her as existential trickster through anachronistic frames. Thus, she refuses to cohere as 'humanist character', inhabiting a multitude of fictional constructions (propagated by herself and others) within a fractured and contradictory 'life-story' that will admit neither linearity nor 'truth'. As Walker astutely observes:

> The entire novel progresses through an accumulation of ways of seeing Sarah, through numerous versions of her relationship with the French lieutenant, none of which are entirely satisfactory, many of which are mutually contradictory. (199)

As the novel's 'enigma' ("Who is Sarah?", 84), she can come to no position of resolution. In structuralist terms, she occupies a multiplicity of shifting

actantial roles – villain, victim, heroine, helper, goal – suggesting an unstable place in the novel's *histoire*, as she slides in its plural *discours*.

While Sarah's 'silence' may be rationalised on a technical level as a plot requirement, many commentators have objected to her status as 'anti-character'. Adam's misgivings about Sarah "lie in the fact that so much may be said about her in theoretical terms and not enough in ordinary ways, about say, her tastes, habits, history, antipathies or desires" (347), while Michael's feminist reading contends that "there is no representation of Sarah as an independent being" (229) since she is filtered through a "triple layering" (225) of male voices (Charles, the narrator and Fowles). Both these objections arise from a desire for a transcendant, coherent model of selfhood influenced, in Michael's case, by a progressivist feminist agenda. However, Sarah as "postmodern" character cannot satisfy their criteria for subjecthood since she both contests the seamlessness of the liberal-humanist ego and, paradoxically, occupies its conventional structures.

Since Sarah is understood neither by Charles (142), nor by the narrator (85), nor even by herself (308), she has often been read in existential terms as defying those sets of labels that would classify and fix her (Dr Grogan's "Melancholia" theory, for example, 134) in order to preserve the mystery of human reality which is not reducible to definable terms. The irony, however, is that her mystery ultimately derives from her postmodern immersion in historical, discursive and aesthetic systems. Gaggi's claim that "Sarah is fascinating because she eludes all systems" (326) bypasses the textual evidence that she is, in fact, entirely enclosed in systems. It is these that make her 'unknowable' (in humanist terms), yet, paradoxically, she is only activated as subject in terms of the various narrative inscriptions which project her into fluctuating discourses. As Siegle suggests, the postmodern subject is only approachable in the "forms inscribable within...discourse" (182).

The narrativity of Sarah's construction has been recognised critically and assimilated to existential philosophy. Docherty, representatively, reads Sarah's "multiplication of textes" (121) and "potential existence within a number of textual stories" (121) in terms of her "personal construction of reality", allowing her, as it were, to "walk out of the text which we are engaged in reading" (121). Her textuality is, thus, seen as an act of willed self-creation in the face of the imprisoning fictions offered by Victorian society.[24] As Rackham asserts:

> [Sarah] has created a new self by her own choice, an authentic self, one outside the recognition of decent people and freed from their petty morals and conventions. (100)

The conventionality and historicity of (self) representation, as mediated through the novel's parodic, framing commentary, surely disallows such a notion of the transcendant ego as fount of action and meaning.

Sarah's mode of resistance may more accurately be termed "disidentification" whereby "the identity and identifications set up in dominant ideology, though never escaped entirely, are transformed and displaced" (Macdonell, 40). If Sarah is intended as a "reproach on the Victorian Age" (Fowles, 1977, 136), her challenge to the "narrow literalness" (54) of its social strictures is conducted in terms of a manipulation of its available discourses. Unable to find a satisfactory place within a convention of moral conduct through female submission, Sarah's strategy is to infiltrate the very masculinist and patriarchal underpinnings of her society in order to refunction them. As the 'Scarlet Woman' of Lyme Regis, Sarah complies with the conventional Madonna/Whore schema at the base of cultural orderings, self-consciously appropriating the props and stratagems of seduction and deception that comprise its apparatus.[25] She exploits the various roles – victim, outcast, seductress – open to her. Her rebellion is, thus, predicated upon and carried out within Victorian norms and values (or what may be called a dominant ideology).[26] While we may be tempted, in terms of her characterisation as a "figure from myth" rather than "any proper fragment of the petty provincial day" (9), to see her as "an a-historic figure" (Conradi, 71) exhibiting "the individual's ability to defy historical sequence" (Kellman, 184), there is no point at which we are able to define her intrinsically.[27] Charles's inability to distinguish the "frontier between the real Sarah and the Sarah he had created" (367) suggests that she is available only through texts, intertexts and contexts. As a thoroughly historical and gendered subject, she uses the very weapon (sexual manipulation) of her 'enemy' (sexist/classist structures) for her own purposes. While she indeed "[sets herself] beyond the pale" (153) – "beyond" being a standard preposition applied to her conduct – Sarah, as postmodern "ex-centric" (Hutcheon, 1988) is located both within and without Victorian discourse, staging an exemplary "complicitous critique" (Hutcheon, 1989, 2). Thus, the contention that "Sarah can be known by no outside structure" (Hutcheon, 1980, 67) is dubious since she can be known only through discourses shaped by material ("outside") forces.

Even her final role as amanuensis in the bohemian Rosetti household is historically specific, though glossed by the existential frame of the Liberated Woman which is highly familiar to a twentieth-century readership. Her textuality, then, is not shaped "according to criteria of contingency and freedom" (Eddins, 221) but according to the "complex but relatively predictable roles" participants may play in "cultural intercourse" (Siegle, 182).

Sarah, thus, serves as a model of postmodern subjectivity (and characterisation). While drawing on the notion of the the Althusserian subject fixed into place by ideology, the postmodern subject refuses the functionalism of that paradigm, actively negotiating meaning in order to resist fixed representations and social systems of power. Sarah undermines *langue* by becoming a generator of *paroles*, her "smaller and multiple narratives which seek no universalising stabilisation and legitimation" (Hutcheon, 1989, 24). As a subversive force, these inscriptions nonetheless recognise that we cannot "create new discourses out of our mere desire" (Russell, 191). When Sarah 'renames' herself "Mrs Roughwood", her new identity is based on the "ingenious transposition of [the] syllables" (375) of her 'old' name (and identity), Sarah Woodruff. The change of name not only points to the postmodern destabilising of the fictional consistency guaranteed by the name, but also to the creation of identity within the rule-bound margins of language (and, by extension, discourse). Sarah can manipulate and displace elements of discursive systems but never fully control them.

Sarah's "systematization", in turn, serves to bracket the "imaginary wholeness" engendered by the unified inscription of Charles's existential 'becoming', exposing its discursive underpinnings. Not only is Charles effected by literary conventions corresponding to social and cultural models of selfhood but his self-structuring narratives, stories and roles are entirely consistent with the historical world (and discourse) from which he derives. His projected ending for the "book of his existence" (295), for example, mobilises available expressive and discursive conventions. Ironically, despite the new insights inculcated by Sarah and the consequent change in direction that Charles's life undergoes, he never leaves these conventions. After the explosive seduction scene which seemingly indicates a breakdown of Victorian mores and a radical shift in Charles's perceptions, he lapses back into characteristic conceptions of Duty ("I must break my engagement", 305) and conventional male typifications of female sexuality. The narrator intercedes with the comment that "Charles was like so many Victorian men" (308), reminding

us of his historical determination at the very moment when it is supposedly undone. The aspects of Charles's behaviour that the narrator calls existential are, like Sarah's, a matter of filling Victorian conventions with new content. His act of rebellion in refusing to evolve into the bourgeois capitalist envisaged by Ernestina's father means that he must remain inside a rapidly disappearing feudal system.[28] While Charles's romance discourse gives a Byronesque mystery to his peripatetic wanderings in search of Sarah and the existential frame codes them as an expression of an anguished search for meaning by an isolated self, Charles is, in fact, entirely locatable in Victorian terms as the leisured travelling gentleman still equipped with class privileges.

The subject as "complex and variable function of discourse" (Foucault, 1977, 90) is repeated in a postmodern interrogation of authorship through the activity of the narrator who acts as "a figure for the novelist John Fowles himself" (Bradbury, 256) in his capacity as implied author (rather than as biographical personage).[29] If the novel's play with conventional novel orderings disrupts the notion of authorial objectivity (omniscience), its over-assertive narrative presence equally problematises the authorial subjectivity celebrated by Romantic and expressive theoretical models. The localisation of the narrator within the expressive contraints of time and place means that the "I" is no longer available as transcendental guarantor of meaning, unity and coherence. The device of the 'author in the carriage', thus, is an offer to situate the author in the "discursive moment". As Eddins observes, the author is "pulled deeper and deeper into the fictive web of the novel" (218). The metaleptic displacement of the narrator onto the diegetic level of the characters represents a challenge to his narrative propriety. As Hutcheon notes, "The voice of the narrator is not an exterior authenticating authorial one; it is the voice of a character" (1980, 63). This is confirmed when Charles's 'text' (his reverie about a properly Victorian reunion with Ernestina) obtrudes on the narrator's text; the two becoming trickily indistinguishable. The need to ask "who is speaking?" destabilises the textual authority invested in the authorial narrator. The slippage from first to third person, as in *The Magus*, exposes the metadiegetic frame of yet another "I" (the author) who also becomes available for textualisation. The Benvenistean flavour of Fowles's own commentary on the novel, similarly, agrees with the notion of layers of textualised "I's", ranging from the author, to the narrator, to characters:

> You are not the 'I' who breaks into the illusion but the 'I' who is part of it. In other words, the 'I' who will make first-person commentaries here and there in my story, and who will finally even enter it, will not be my real 'I' in 1967 but much more just another character, though in a different category from the purely fictional ones. (142).

This "I" (of the narrator and, by extension, the author) is a very "minor figure" (394), we are assured, allowing the author to provide an "antidote to himself" (Rothblatt, 356).

On the other hand, the literalisation of the figure of the author (pushing the intrusiveness of the Victorian narrator to its logical extreme) dramatises our desire for the author as site of authority. Since the narrating "I" is not "merely the personification of a massive indifference in things" content in assigning characters to the "shadows of oblivion" (296) but an active controlling and selecting presence, arranging the plot, chronology and character actions (as the narrator's prop, his watch, reveals) the author "function" remains intact. The appeal, however, is no longer to a unified author but to a series of subject positions and functions, filtered through conventional codes and ploys. The appearance of the author "got in as he really wasn't" (346), the "aggressively secure" (346) Victorian narrator, "so typical of the age" (346) in his "confidence in his own judgement of others" (347), is matched by his guise as "successful impresario" (394), the withdrawn modern promoter of the spectacle whose "foppish and Frenchified" (394) apparel links him with the creators of the *nouveau roman* and who "very evidently regards the world as his to use and possess as he likes" (395). This provides an illustration of the "author of the fiction" recoverable, like Conchis, at textual junctures through various historically-influenced rhetorics. As a multi-form text that reflexively foregrounds its multiplicity of narrative codes, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* reveals the author as a "plurality of egos" (Foucault, 1977, 288), retaining a textualised authority. This is taken up in the case of Thomas Hardy who, in chapter thirty five, is pursued and reconstructed through "an interpretation of discursive structures derived from fictional, poetic, or documentary texts" (Siegle, 184), leading to the "semiotic being we call the author, Thomas Hardy" (184). The author is, thus, no longer a transcendant, personal and uniform presence but a collection of codes which may be shifting, contradictory or relatively unstable.

The reader is, similarly, textually inscribed, acting as the nodal point of the foregrounded narrative conventions and genres that constitute "multiple,

interlocking systems of reference" (Crosman, 90), conditioning readerly "horizons of expectation".[30] Furthermore, the reader is temporally situated within a modern context by a postmodern frame that shrewdly anticipates and ironises a series of interpretative moves favouring the existential "interpretative master code" (Jameson, 10). The planting of a wilfully modern misreading 'in the text' allows 'real' readers to deconstruct and resist such an inscription. As a "reductive fiction of the real reader" (Creighton, 221), the 'model' modern reader suggests both an inextricable implication in contemporary sense-making mechanisms and an ironic freedom from them.

vi

To recapitulate, the reflexive examination of novel conventions in their historical context leads into a particular notion of reality and subjectivity which accords with contemporary theorising of the postmodern. Since narrative by this account "derives its authority not from the "reality" it imitates, but from the cultural conventions that define both narrative and the construct we call "reality" " (Siegle, 225), existentialism in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* becomes a modernising construction or discursive convention. As has been suggested, the postmodern interrogation of temporally defined signifying systems refuses it an assignment to the place of moral "signified". While it retains its validity as explanatory vehicle, it is denied final authority. However, the irony that displaces its hierarchical prerogative has more often than not been 'neutralised' in critical commentary, resulting in a spectacular array of 'ethical-humanist' criticism which assumes that the novel is bounded by and may be adequately interpreted through a humanistic brand of existentialism.

The unanimity of such existential readings has its consequence in a concerted critical effort to integrate technique and theme. The contention that Fowles "finds a form which can carry without due stress almost all of [his] major themes" (Campbell, 51) finds its logical conclusion in the claim that his "existential outlook [is] transmuted into fictional form" (Friedman, iii). As with *The Magus*, this intertwining of ethics and aesthetics has taken on various permutations and degrees of subtlety, as is revealed by a representative sample of commentaries.

There seem to be four related strands of argument in this existential/aesthetic linkage. The most 'basic' reading would see a literal inscription of existential "Hazard", contingency and choice into the very form of the novel,

centering upon its multiple endings.[31] Other readings suggest that the reader's "existential initiation" (Eddins, 220) into an "unplanned world of Hazard" (Hagopian, 196) occurs less in terms of a "mimesis of pure contingency" (Kermode, 132) than a gestural or emblematic freedom predicated on the "absurdity of reality and the order which people or artists impose on that chaos by means of concepts of art" (Cohen, 149). The avoidance of the "ideational tyranny" (Eddins) of fiction is facilitated by the flaunting of novel artifice whereby the rigidity of form is rendered 'harmless' – liberating the reader from "another possible enthrallment" (Kellman, 165) – so that the flux of reality is allowed to flow into it, presenting "an ideation which contains contingency, thus portraying reality as the existentialist perceives it" (Cohen, 150). In this light, chapter thirteen becomes a site of discursive self-exposure for an existential novelist who wishes to strip away the illusions, pretences and fraudulences of novel-writing and to reveal his creative scruples, while the triple ending, furthermore, enacts a gesture of "refusal to delimit the options of [the] novel" (Kellman, 166). An offshoot of this reading is the by now familiar rejection of Victorian fiction, purportedly the epitome of the fixed ideation which patently falsifies the reality it pretends to replicate, in favour of a superior modern aesthetic of which reflexivity is the keynote. Conversely (and simultaneously), commentaries stress the liberatory rather than the distortive effects of fiction which is the "highest form of truth" (Holmes, 1981, 188) so that the generation of fictions becomes the occasion for existential emancipation and growth, as demonstrated in the case of Sarah who designs fictions to "grow as a free individual" (Holmes, 1981, 195).[32]

Ingenious and persuasive as these readings may be, their cardinal error is to extract a moral theme from the novel's autocommentary. While Hawkes reminds us that " a work of fiction can only speak of its own coming into being against the background of speaking about something else" (67), "aboutness" in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is always linked reflexively to its enabling socio-historic conditions or contexts. Consequently, themes themselves are revealed as constitutive operations and morality as an assemblage of signifiers. Even an apparently 'postmodern' reading like Conradi's which suggests that the "text insistently and wittily remind[s] us of its historically bound inauthenticity and incompleteness" (76) ultimately recovers reflexivity for the existential theme by acting as an apologist for it. Hutcheon, too, does not manage to avoid assigning the 'final say' to existentialism by suggesting that "The plot structure of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* enacts the dialectic

of freedom and power that is the modern existentialist and even Marxist answer to Victorian or Darwinian determinism" (1988, 45). Once again, the novel becomes comprehensible through existentialism whereby "The world is held in its completed, authorised, descriptive state" (Burden, 1980, 139), despite Hutcheon's strong postmodern recognition that "the novel requires [a] historical context to interrogate the present (as well as the past) through its critical irony" (1988, 45).

Ultimately, such readings place the autocommentary as an adjunct to a moral theme, serving to coax it into position as a final "signified". The recuperative nature of such commentaries means that the more radical suggestions of what I have identified as a postmodern reflexivity are bypassed. In particular, postmodern reflexive conceptions of narrative as a basic cultural constituent (implicated in and shaped by material forces), of differential parodic relations between the (literary) past and present and of the collective semiosis from which meanings and subjects derive are sidestepped in favour of notions of fictional autonomy, temporal egocentricity, an intrinsic, transcendent model of selfhood and *ex nihilo* (self) creation. Indeed, these accounts identify a textual *self-consciousness* whereby the work achieves a mature, plenitudinous self-awareness that is akin to metaphysical conceptions of consciousness and selfhood.

A further problem with such criticism is its tendency to collapse reflexivity into the existential narrative, suggesting that in combination they comprise the 'modern' component of the novel's transhistorical literary 'survey' (Burden's claim for a modern "aesthetic and ethical fusion", 1979, 148, is a case in point). Against this I have argued that the self-directed parodic nature of reflexivity in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* means that the autocommentary pulls away from the existential 'modern' narrative in order to ironise, in turn, its styles, positions and strategies.

Thus, against the neat existential/reflexive configurations offered by critics and the supportive role reflexivity is perceived to play in relation to existentialism, I have attempted to identify a radical postmodern autocommentary which entails a recognition that reflexivity works against the possibility of the existential discourse as final "signified". This does not mean that existentialism and postmodernism do not share common traits. Arac explicitly interrelates them in his observation that postmodernism displays a "Sartrean, existential concern for the engagements of worldly life" (x). This rightly implies that existentialism is a 'wordly' philosophy, appealing to concrete

and finite individuals located in historical time and space. Consequently, existentialism and postmodernism share a desire to wrest a shifting, plural and provisional reality from authoritative and habitualised 'explanations', be they Victorian moral propriety or twentieth century consumer capitalism. However, if both are 'subversive' systems aimed at 'the world itself', they pursue their ends in remarkably divergent ways.[33] Indeed, as final "signified" (a morality/theme in itself), existentialism would appear to be radically opposed to postmodernism, as these positions are defined in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Taken as an 'end' in itself (rather than a discourse pervaded by postmodern decentring), existentialism in the novel is concerned with the ineluctibility of human freedom, conceived as the ability to envisage alternative possibilities ("what is not the case"). As such, freedom manifests itself in choice which is always projected *against* the external constraints (social conventions and institutions) which overdetermine behaviour and, hence, mitigate against our inalienable freedom. As Olsen asserts:

> In desiring, valuing and existing we necessarily reject the world in which we live. All projects which are turned towards acceptance of the world as constituted imply a dimunition of our being and a loss of self-respect in so far as they tend to reduce the tension which constitutes the necessary condition of free human action. (56)

Sarah's behaviour within the existential discourse is seen as a challenge to an authoritative class-based moral system – "...where is your birth, your science, your etiquette, your social order?" (162) – while Charles's conventional posturing constitutes a characteristic 'flight from freedom' into the 'bad faith' implicit in the acceptance of essentialised roles. The basis of his existential education is an emancipation from "illusions" – "history, religion, duty, social position" (179). These "painted screens" (179) are merely a thin crust of meaning upon an obdurate world of "in-itself" contingency and their ultimate effect is to "shut out reality" (179) in a denial of the human ("for-itself") ability to choose.[34]

"History", in particular, is a major determinant of inauthentic behaviour. Charles is a "man struggling to overcome history" (224) – both in the sense that it allots him an inauthentic role and that it threatens to make him redundant in the wake of the rise of the middle-class entrepeneurial spirit epitomised by Mr Freeman. Existential choice enables him to "[throw] off his age" (316) which is the "great hidden enemy of all his deepest yearnings"

(315). Like Nicholas, he finally seeks to shake off all determining ties, avoiding the English "like the plague" (364) in a bid to resist the "rigid iron rule of his own country" (373). Thus, existential authenticity arises out of the dissolution of history, narrative, time itself – "the moment overcame the age" (217), "Time was the great fallacy, existence was without history, was always now" (179). The "yielding up of the plot of history to the authentic action of the will" (Conradi, 75) suggests the replacement of a collective history by the self-fashioned history of the existential individual. As Olsen puts it, "If man makes history, it is because man himself is not made by history" (52), celebrating the individual as the source of meaning.

While postmodernism would agree that all meaning is ultimately humanly constructed, it defines such meaning as a collective, pre-fabricated system which precedes the individual consciousness. The self is always underwritten by transsubjective semiotic networks which are historically defined. Since we are bound to use the conventional, agreed-upon categories of language, "then certainly we are all guilty of bad faith every time we open our mouths" (Warnock, 1970, 99). As a receptor of a language system (with its ensuing discursive possibilities), the "individual subject can be construed to be a mere topographical point in a space formed by forces that determine his entire being" (Thiher, 70). As such, convention is not merely a "[smear on the window of reality]" (46) but the "window" itself, as Fowles's investigation of the historically-bound and enabling conventions of sexuality, time and space would indicate. Determinism is, thus, no longer a pernicious threat to existential consciousness. In Foucault's words, "...it is not that the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by the social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it" (qtd. in Macdonnell, 108). Indeed, while such a view of human reality circumscribes the autonomy of the individual, it does not preclude change or choice. What it does imply is that the options open to the "free man" are always discursive and that "history constitutes those who play out its processes" (Siegle, 202).

Consequently, there is no possibility for the existential discourse of the novel to be realised on its own terms. There is, finally, no point at which Charles walks out of history into a non-discursive "paradise of plenitude and authenticity" (Siegle, 202) implicit in the existential concept of "Hazard", for the postmodern commentary shows that he is always contained in historical conventions – both aesthetic and social. Typical critical recuperations suggesting that Charles arrives at a "private, nameless kernel of selfhood"

(Wolfe, 26), moving "out of the collector-consciousness of the Victorian Age into a timeless world of selfhood" (Palmer, 1974, 51) are clearly untenable. Equally so is Palmer's conception of "an existential self undistorted by social convention" (1974, 51).

Nor for that matter, can Charles exchange one set of conventions for another, striding into the twentieth century. Siegle's claim that Charles and Sarah have "shifted discursive norms for their course in life" (202) presumably implies that their radical questioning of Victorian discourses and value systems breaks down previous relations, ideas and subject positions and allows them to appropriate a new discourse. However, even this notion is problematic, for the postmodern situating of subjects within their historical/discursive worlds means that the modern existential discourse is not available to them. Indeed, as has been argued, the actions of Sarah and Charles and their displacements of available discursive norms are locatable entirely within Victorian parameters.[35] To this extent, if Charles becomes disaffected with an existing version of reality, it is by no means clear that his altered state of consciousness is existential, despite the efficacy of such a lexis in explaining his dilemmas. McGregor's claim that Charles achieves existential enlightenment "under the guidance of the modern author" (44) is telling, since existential consciousness is, by implication, imposed artificially on Charles from above. Indeed, we are reminded of this by the narrator who 'recodes' the Arnoldian epigraph to the final chapter – "A modern existentialist would no doubt substitute 'humanity' or 'authenticity' for piety; but he would recognise Arnold's intent" (398). By implication, Chatles and Sarah are *not* modern existentialists, except by virtue of the narrator who supplies them with the requisite consciousness and its vocabulary.

Thus, the status of the existential discourse is continually qualified and, to some extent, undermined. If it does serve as a viable modern explanatory perspective, replacing Victorian conceptions of reality and selfhood, the presentation of history in the novel in terms of a succession of paradigms which break down as their explanatory potential diminishes, means that it, too, is a transitory discourse. Ironically, the postmodern commentary which dismantles the conventionality and discursivity of existentialism might be seen as its successor since it offers yet another "new reality,... new causation,... new creation" (316), another modification in conceiving of reality and subjectivity.

In the absence of the possibility of existentialism acting as an uncontested moral norm, it is essential to define the kind of freedom that is delivered by the autocommentary. D'Haen's suggestion that "Fowles's main merit lies in questioning the validity of all ruling world views, and in affirming man's essential freedom in the face of them" (175) is typical of the humanist emphasis that wants reflexivity to reinforce an existential theme. However, if the novel is a "stratagem to unblind" (318), its freedom inducing act is not necessarily existential in nature. Its foregrounding of the enunciative strategies of 'saying' means that its liberation can occur neither in terms of a literal emancipation of a metaphysical reader nor in terms of a reminder of the endless possibilities of the fictional medium. Its historical consciousness examines the forces that condition novel production and consumption, focusing on the inexorability and determination of form. Thus, its liberatory tactic is to 'mark' conventions, in a dual movement that both situates us within them (as we make meaning) and delivers us from their (concealed) power. This constitutive poetics both validates narrative as a primary ordering mechanism and recognises that specific narratives are only orders among other possibilities, held in power by the vagaries of historical chance. As Siegle puts it, "...the constitutive is an expressly politicized morality of making and ordering according to a collective construct, one that is thus ever amenable to change rather than following "laws" limiting the possibility of change" (244). However, this notion of change and choice occurs within a laid-down field of discursive possibilities, leading to a situated freedom which is clearly not existential. "Man" as agent, in postmodern terms, can reconstitute existing meaning systems but never offer to create 'original' meaning nor to emerge from conventions altogether.

Siegle, who gives full due to the more radical postmodern reflexivity in the novel, suprisingly finds nothing problematic in the relationship between existentialism and a postmodern deconstructive poetics.[36] Indeed, by drawing on Fowles's definition of existentialism in *The Aristos* as "not a philosophy but a way of looking at, and utilizing, other philosophies. It is a theory of relativity among theories of absolute truth" (123), he suggests that existentialism is able to ingest postmodernism as a kind of self-update (202). Other accounts agree that existentialism is "not a philosophy but a label for several different revolts against traditional philosophy" (Kaufmann, 11), that it is "doctrineless" (Wolfe, 25), "not a system" (Warnock, 1970, 1), "anti-metaphysical" (Olafson, 147). However, these definitions of existentialism as a clearing house for different philosophical influences and strains deny the

extent to which it does possess 'hardened' features of its own. As Warnock indicates, existentialism is an "ethics" which, if it has no moral imperatives, nonethless is able to prescribe the *route* to self-defined moral behaviour: "Pretence, pretentiousness, wilful ignorance, blind adherence to convention are *wrong*, because they are obstacles to free choice" (my emphasis, 1970, 33). Its extensive treatment of moral relations between people, its specialised vocabulary and its dependence on well-defined conceptions of the individual, human nature, freedom and choice suggests that Fowles's (and others') apprehension of its radical relativity is somewhat exaggerated. Moreover, its functioning in the novel as a moral alternative to Victorian oppression in terms of an ethical reading – a "truth beyond...truths" (224) – and the postmodern appropriation and ironisation of its typified positions, strategies and terminology suggests that it may be regarded as a set of metaphors based on presence and consciousness, a discourse and a 'metaphysics' of sorts.[37]

As such, the novel, by its own postmodern logic, prevents itself from being read in unproblematic existential moral terms. The ascendancy of a postmodern parodic reflexive commentary means that existentialism can no longer function as an unproblematic signified, falling 'victim' to a ruthless historicising impulse which 'de-moralises' it. Conversely, since most commentators have not taken into account the evidence for a radical postmodern reflexivity, existentialism is granted hierarchical sovereignty so that the ironising, deconstructive force of postmodernism is cancelled out or weakened, as indicated by the numerous readings which conflate existentialism and reflexivity or remake the autocommentary in the image of the existential discourse. In contrast, my reading has set out to demonstrate that the representative critical assessment that "*The French Lieutenant's Woman* does not venture beyond the limits of the territory Fowles has mapped out as his own" (Loveday, 81) is more an index of a reluctance on the part of critics to venture beyond the territory of humanist existentialism than of any bounds imposed by the novel itself.

CONCLUSION

In line with Siegle's suggestion that "the "author" is himself a textual product of his works insofar as they replace "him", become what we mean when we speak of "him" " (204), I have sought to supplement an "existential John Fowles", constructed at the confluence of textual traces – novelistic themes, interviews, authorial statements, philosophical tracts – with another, more radical implied "John Fowles". This "author", identifiable through the reflexive aesthetic which prevails in the novels, becomes gradually interested in our 'understanding' and construction of self and world through constitutive fictions, both literary and socio-cultural. The consequent breakdown between authenticity and narrative, between fictional, constructed selves and 'real' stably realised consciousnesses, between 'reality' and a web of discursive practices that occurs varyingly in the novels I have discussed means that Fowles's work is not explicable entirely in terms of an existential humanism or a liberal poetics. Indeed, an appeal to the interplay of discourses and codes within the novels themselves (rather than to an externally validated 'authorial intention') reveals that the possibility for an unqualified moral 'existential' reading of the texts is progressively displaced.

Critical interpretations that treat Fowles's work in terms of a presentation of free agents exercising their autonomous responsibility, acting and choosing within conditions, usually social, that threaten a priceless individuality, are not 'wrong', however. While responding validly to narrative positions in the texts, such commentaries, nonetheless, fail to recognise the extent to which Fowles's works equally ironise, undermine and displace the assumptions of their own existential programmes. In *The Collector*, as I have argued, a reflexive conception of narrative as the agency of a 'real' self divested of social definitions and classifications (and, hence, an 'authentic' self) is interrupted by a narrative strategy which restores the subject to its socially constituted, discursive origins. This throws Miranda's heroic existential status into question. While Nicholas's growth to existential authenticity may still occur in *The Magus*, it cannot do so in terms of the usual pattern promised by the opening *bildungsroman* frame whereby a 'real' self narrates a process of personal development. Indeed, Nicholas's entry into the fictive

structure of the Godgame introduces a reflexive element which revises the very grounds of reality and selfhood upon which the existential theme depends. Finally, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the existential theme becomes caught up in a postmodern aesthetic which ironises and problematises its status. The historical frame of the novel exposes the temporal provisionality of the existential narrative mode, throwing into question, too, the ability of the protagonists to enter an 'out of time' discourse. The concept of a free-standing, autonomous selfhood is similarly challenged by the postmodern 'situating' of subjectivity. Not only does Fowles's reflexivity infiltrate the novels' thematic premises, but it modifies the relations between self-exposure and freedom to the extent that critical claims for the liberation of the work, the reader and the author cannot be realised in existential terms, as I have argued at length.

Thus, while commentators have either assimilated Fowles's reflexivity to an existential-humanist moral vision (as this study has demonstrated) or regarded it as a demerit, registered in Lever's reference to Fowles's "inability to reconcile his intellectual beliefs about what men and novelist should be with his own strongest instincts and abilities" (87), in Bradbury's claim that "Fowles's real intensity of achievment lies in what he does in the [moral-thematic] mode" (263) and in McEwan's dismissal of the novels' reflexive deconstructions as the "critical in Fowles thwarting the creative" (28), my own approach has attempted to reappraise Fowles's reflexive poetics. As I have contended, the freeing of reflexivity from its obligatory supporting role to existential thematics reveals an astonishing rigour and self-questioning ability, an engagement with theoretical presuppositions and stances that is dynamic and constantly reformulated. Furthermore, the contradictions, slippages and displacements that I have identified in the novels are a valuable source of enrichment and interpretative possibility, suggesting that there may be vistas in Fowles's texts not yet fully recognised and explored.

APPENDIX

A brief consideration of the rest of Fowles's *oeuvre* bears out the claims of this study. Not only do the rest of Fowles's works recapitulate the typology of reflexive positions I identified in relation to his first three novels, but his later novels (*Mantissa*, *A Maggot*) display a marked movement away from existential themes.

The Ebony Tower (1974), considered to be a "primer to the more sustained and complex variations of the novels" (McSweeney, 313), ostensibly presents yet another series of existential ordeals: Catherine, the imaginative, sensitive heroine of "The Cloud", succumbs to a pathological depression and enters the "black hole" (299) of the existential void; Jennings, the detective pursuing a missing politician in "The Enigma", is himself led to greater authenticity and imaginative potential by Isobel Dodgson who leads him to a "direction he could follow, if she would show it" (236); the self-satisfied 'literary' narrator of "Poor Koko" comes to increased self-awareness when a thief incinerates four year's worth of painstaking research for a new book; while David Williams, the existential quester and 'inauthentic man' of the work's centrepiece, "The Ebony Tower", is confronted with "a kind of realistic version of *The Magus*" (Fowles, in Robinson, 584), becoming torn between a "passion for existence" (102) offered at the Cöetminais *manoir* of Breasley, an expatriate English artist, and the "mere fact of being" (102) of his comfortable middle class marriage.

The stories of *The Ebony Tower*, however, also intersect with many of Fowles's reflexive concerns. David's existential failure in "The Ebony Tower" – "...he had refused...a new chance of existence...what he was born, [he] still was, and always would be: a decent man and eternal also-ran" (112-113) – is a refusal to commit himself to art, turning his back on the "little forest womb" (84) that resembles Conchis's Bourani. Bereft of Nicholas's aesthetic salvation in *The Magus*, the "relentless face of the present tense" (114) that engulfs him when he meets his wife at the Paris airport is not the redemptive present tense of art but the stale quotidian present tense of life (or its conventional metaphors), providing an interesting angle to the life/art debate that has

preoccupied critics of *The Magus*. "Poor Koko" resurrects the class dynamics of *The Collector* in an encounter between a "semi-literate" (151) burglar and a professional writer who believes in what is "humane, intelligent and balanced" (148). A "fatal clash between...one who trusts and reveres language and one who suspects and resents it" (185), the story culminates in the 'senseless' destruction of the writer's research which becomes an effective image for art/language as the centre of class struggle, revising the categories of victimiser and victimised. "The Enigma" reflexively mobilises a popular detective genre to create a *mise en abyme* of its own generation. The missing politican, Fielding, who has 'walked out of the plot' is literally a textual 'absence' whose story cannot, consequently, be recovered or explained. In projecting plausible scenarios for Fielding's disappearance, Isobel and Jennings pretend that they are characters in a detective story being composed by someone else, reminding us not only of the ontological fictionality of the text itself but of the narrativity of our existence so that the 'ending' provided by Isobel and Jennings as they become lovers can be nothing but 'story'.

Daniel Martin (1977) is regarded as "the culmination of Fowles's development towards a positive, existentialist humanism" (Gotts, 81), devoid of the "trickery" that characterises the earlier novels (Huffaker, 19, 136). It chronicles the progression of another alienated self, film producer Daniel Martin, as he is educated into existential engagement by a female teacher figure, Jane Mallory. This journey to "whole sight" (7) is monitored by the narrative Daniel himself is creating, linking the novel to the *mise en abyme* 'telling' selves of *The Collector* and *The Magus*. Thus, *Daniel Martin* belongs both to the expressive reflexive position of *The Collector* and to the *bildungsroman* mode of *The Magus*. However, as in the earlier novels, the relations between narrative and self in *Daniel Martin* become problematic. The concern to arrive at the "real history of what I am" (15) is, ironically, mediated by an interplay of first and third-person perspectives, corresponding to the creation of a multitude of textual Daniels – past and present – rather than to an integrated centred 'authentic' self. This is compounded by the novel's central *mise en abyme*, Daniel's decision to write the story of his fictional persona, Simon Wolfe, increasing the novel's stock of storybook selves. As in *The Magus*, narrative as a prism of a 'real' self becomes a vexed question as the 'telling' and the 'told' selves move apart and narrative authority and detachment are thrown into question. The replacement of the shifting narrative *montage* of the opening sections by a consistent third-person perspective has been motivated as a sign of Daniel's maturation whereby he

achieves the "secure overview of the traditional novelist" (Arlett, 181). Influenced by a Lukácsian realist dictum that advocates a dialectic between self and the historical/social world that surrounds it, the novel reflexively suggests that an acceptance of "the great and progressive literary traditions of realism in preference to formalistic experiment" (500) allows Daniel the "emotional attempt to see life totally" (501). "Whole sight" is attained through the "mature whole and steady sight of the master artist who looks and speaks with knowledge of self...to his audience of fellow humans" (Arlett, 183), integrating first-person (the subjective, inner self) and third-person (the objective appraisal of self) stances. However, coming, as it does, after *The French Lieutenant's Woman* which thoroughly dismantles the claims of the all-seeing 'realist' author, we may suspect that we have not been presented with the 'true story' of Daniel Martin but with yet another of Fowles's reflexive engagements with the problematics of the represented self. After all, the unnamed last sentence of Daniel's novel becomes Fowles's first sentence "Whole sight; or all the rest is desolation" (7), releasing Daniel into a 'higher' plot, yet, simultaneously, embedding the author in the textual matrix (S. Wolfe being an anagram for Fowles) and exposing his detached authorial stance as no more stable and reliable a convention than the fragmentary partial first-person vision he seeks to overcome.

In the light of a recovery of the more radical reflexive elements of the early novels, Fowles's *Mantissa* (1982) is not the anomaly that critics perceive it it be. Indeed, rather than an attempt to "frustrate further the efforts of those endeavouring to reach an understanding of Fowles's achievement" (Gotts, 81) or a "thoroughly fabulistic work that exhibits little or no connection with [Fowles's] earlier fiction" (Haegert, 171), *Mantissa* may be read as a replay and crystallisation of earlier reflexive concerns in ultratextual and parodied form. A reprise of the scaled-down narrative situation of The *Collector*, the prison cell in this novel is literally the mind of the author (graphically represented by the grey padded cell in which the author-persona, Miles Green, finds himself after a bout of amnesia). An allegory of the creative process (through the dominant metaphor of the sexual act), *Mantissa* begins as a story about an amnesia victim but is "deliciously manipulated into a story about a writer telling a story about an amnesia victim" (Gotts, 87). Miles Green's writer's block is ostensibly cured by his Muse, Dr A. Delphie, who delivers, like a triumphant obstetrician, "a small sheaf of paper, a lovely little story" (48). However, whether the Muse is the generator of the story or herself part of it (a personification of the writer's own imagination cast in

female form) becomes the cornerstone of the novel, as writer-persona and Muse-character engage in a dazzling display of sado-masochistic erotics. This spectacular web of paronomasia, literary allusion and metaphor serves as a comment on, among other things, authorial control, the claims of the creative imagination and the dynamics of sexual politics, all of which receive extended reflexive treatment in the earlier novels. The novel ends with the novelist seemingly at the mercy of his imagination, rendered impotent by the Muse, Erato, who reincarnates him as a satyr; punishment for the patriarchal metaphors in which he has imprisoned her. However, the ultimate origin of author, character, the imagination itself may be Language, as the opening scene which parodies the creation of the Word/World and describes the entry of the author/subject into its organising, constitutive categories reveals. As in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, liberation from the controlling Author-Male can occur only in terms of our manipulation of the *langue* which we are, nonetheless, obliged to use. Thus, if the essentially dehumanised narrative canvas with which Fowles works in *Mantissa*, teasingly rejecting "story, character, suspense, description, all that antiquated nonsense from pre-modernist times" (118), presents a departure from earlier work, it is nonetheless prepared for by the reflexive infiltration and problematisation of the existential humanist quest in earlier works, culminating, as I have suggested, in the constitutive poetics of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

If *Mantissa* represents a foray into a form of ultratextualism, Fowles's latest novel, *A Maggot* (1985), returns to the historiographic reflexive mode of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The historical setting this time is England of 1736, mediated by a twentieth-century narrator, who, if less intrusive and playful than that of the previous novel, nonetheless, interprets the sexist and classist structures of an earlier age within a similar awareness that we are, like the novel's characters, "equal victims in the debtor's prison of History, and equally unable to leave it" (231). As a "faction" that problematises our recuperation of the 'truth' of the past, the novel interpolates the structures of the detective novel and of the court case in order to foreground its anxieties about fact, truth and interpretation, interspersing too, pages from the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1736 to underline its exploitation of the history/fiction dichotomy. As "apochryphal" (McHale, 90) or revisionist history, the novel dramatises the confrontation between the dominant patriarchal voice of the male lawyer, Ayscough, and the marginalised voice of the female prostitute, Rebecca Lee, who becomes the leader of a 'feminist' religious movement, the Shakers, who dissented from patriarchal versions of God in preference for

the notion of a female Christ figure and a recognition of the matriarchal and feminine underpinnings of Christianity. Thus, unlike the silenced Sarah who liberates herself by manipulating available "female" images, Rebecca is given a "voice", a situated, gendered discourse, which ties in with Fowles's preoccupation with the historical, gendered and classist constitution of subjectivity that can be traced back, as I have argued, to his earliest work, *The Collector*.

This cursory examination not only confirms Fowles's artistic self-questioning and rigour, as he actively selects from a range of literary modes which are reflexively explored in his work, but validates the approach underlining this study. The reappraisal of the early novels, in this light, serves as a valuable pointer to the direction in which Fowles's later reflexive development has taken him and lays the groundwork for a new and fuller understanding of his body of works as a whole.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

(1) I deviate from Siegle, however, where he extends reflexivity to *all* narratives (8) and accounts for them in terms of a constitutive poetics, examining the way in which "fiction interprets, composes, structures or posits a world – constitutes it out of the innumerable code elements collected by means of the allusive powers of language" (9). While all texts certainly *do* do this, I would still differentiate overtly reflexive texts (what Waugh and Hutcheon call metafictional or self-conscious fictions) from texts that are not directly concerned with demonstrating their own methods. Furthermore, not all reflexive texts embrace a constitutive poetics in the way that Siegle intends. In fact, only *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, among the works I have chosen to discuss, adopts such a self-contextualising postmodern constitutive perspective on itself.

(2) Detailed discussions of a range of reflexive practices are provided by Hutcheon (1980), chapters 1,3, 5 and 8, and by Waugh, 13 – 19 and chapter 5.

(3) While reflexivity is undoubtedly an exploratory, libertarian mode, serving to dehabitualise and to "[heighten] the difficulty of perception...in order to awaken an active response in the reader" (Uspensky, qtd. in Orr, 1981, 206), it also functions as a self-contextualising force, setting up its own and first critical reading. In Hutcheon's words:

> Art forms have increasingly appeared to distrust external criticism to the extent that they have sought to incorporate critical commentary within their own structures in a kind of self-legitimizing short-circuit of the normal critical dialogue (1985, 1)

(4) My references to critical works in this study only cover, for the most part, professional academic articles and books dealing with Fowles. They do not include reviews.

(5) Like most commentators on Fowles's work, my discussions of existentialism are populist and, to some extent, crudified, perhaps stemming from

Fowles's own fairly simplified version of the philosophy. Thus, I have not accounted for the considerable complexity and rigour of the body of thought we term 'existential'. Nor, for that matter, do I give Fowles's treatment of existentialism extended attention, other than in its interactions with the reflexive aspects of the novels which are my focus.

(6) Thorough discussions of *The Aristos* as the grounds for Fowles's fictional practice are provided by Wolfe, chapter 1 and by Burden (1980), chapter 1.

(7) Authenticity may be summed up as "the prime existential virtue; it consists in the avoidance of that false relation to oneself and to others that is set up when choices are represented as something other than what they are – something for which the individual is not responsible" (Olafson, 203).

(8) While commentators have drawn out other sources for Fowles's work, such as his debt to Heraclitus and to modern scientific theories (see Nadeau, for example), to archetypal romance, to Hardy and to the Pre-Raphaelites (see Baker), to Jungian psychology and to natural history, all these elements may be assimilated to the critical mobilisation, for Fowles's work, of the 'novel of education', depicting processes of growth to self-knowledge classified under the convenient umbrella word, existentialism.

(9) An excellent overview of various uses of the term "postmodern" is provided by Bertens (9-51). E. Ann Kaplan also accounts for various strains of postmodernism (1-5).

(10) Other discussions of the relationship of postmodernism to modernism may be found in Suleiman and in Chabot. See also McHale (4-9) and Hutcheon (1988, 1989) who discusses this issue intermittently.

(11) This also suggests that reflexive fictions cannot ultimately dispense with critical intervention and are still open to interpretation. Indeed, Carroll's warning is apt:

> No frame, even the one the text visibly gives itself, ever adequately accounts for the conflictual operations at work within the text or keeps the product of these operations totally within itself. (197)

The complex interactions and spillages of discourses in Fowles's novels bear out this contention.

(12) A noteworthy examples of this is Wolfe's suggestion that "The concealment operation does not play a big part in Fowles. He does not cover his

tracks or lay false trails; his putting himself at the heart of his novels removes the need for literary detection" (47). Also pertinent is Palmer's claim that "*The Aristos* provides a glass through which one can see darkly into the landscape of the author's mind" (1974, 6).

(13) The Sartre of *What is Literature?*, for example, seems to adopt an instrumental view of language, opposing the "utilitarian" (1950, 10) function of prose to the poetic refusal to "utilize language" (1950, 5). His manifesto for a *literature engagé* is based on a policy of "action by disclosure" (1950, 13) whereby the writer must "reveal the world" (1950, 14) in order to change it. His philosophy of literature, then, is fundamentally content-based, eschewing the "aesthetic purism" (1950, 17) of movements like the Symbolists and the Surrealists and advocating that style "should go unnoticed" (1950, 15). The passionate commitment of self (and writer) to *praxis* in Sartre's philosophy of writing differs considerably from the location of the dialectics of self on a metalinguistic level in the postmodern reflexive novel, resulting in a more depersonalised notion of subjectivity and authorship.

(14) It must be stressed, however, that this is not a philosophical discussion and that my remarks are intended to be serviceable, drawing out a particular area of contention in Fowles's novels rather than levelled at the philosophies themselves.

(15) While I use Derrida's terminology from time to time, I do not follow his methods in this examination. It is only in *The Collector*, after all, that a set of submerged and disruptive critical themes run at odds with a surface argument for narrative presence. In *The Magus* and, particularly, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, I trace the rhetorical interplay of highly worked and conscious discourses which leads to contradiction and/or displacement, following Barthes's notion of the text as a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings...blend and clash" (1977, 143).

(16) While I have avoided discussion of the tricky problem of "authorial intention", I am not claiming that Fowles *deliberately* undercuts his own existential themes. My argument, instead, hinges on a textual dynamics whereby two highly worked discourses interact mutually to produce areas of incompatibility and contradiction (a phenomenon, no doubt, "unintended" by Fowles). Thus, the existential theme, in varying ways, becomes 'caught up' in a reflexive discourse which prevents the kind of unequivocal 'moral' reading of the texts that Fowles's critics have tended to offer.

THE COLLECTOR

(1) I am aware that *The Magus* was written before *The Collector*, though it was published second. However, I have chosen to treat the novels in their published order since *The Collector* seems structurally and thematically a 'first novel', given the greater reflexive sophistication of Fowles's later works.

(2) Most of these accounts identify Miranda with "Shakespeare's heroine" (Conradi, 37), since she is also "comely and innocent" (Rackham, 93), "young, beautiful, vital, sensitive, and innocent" (Laughlin, 74) and has "attempts made on her virtue by her salvage and deformed slave and awaits an impossible rescue" (Conradi, 37). Clegg, consequently, is Ferdinand (a parodied would-be lover) and Caliban, "a half-monster who horrifies us yet arouses a strong feeling of pity" (Rackham, 93), "estranged spiritually and morally from all finer human qualities" (Rackham, 92). Loveday claims that the "mingled fear and pity which Prospero feels for Caliban recur as the extremes of Miranda's reactions to Clegg" (15). Miranda's cell is also like Shakespeare's "isolated isle" (Rackham, 93) where "everything is provided except the means of escape" (93) but "...there is no Prospero or Ariel with magic powers on hand in the island of Miranda's prison" (Laughlin, 75). Other accounts suggest that G.P. acts as a Prospero-like "mentor and father figure" (Loveday, 15), a "Prospero of the London art world, full of magical charm for those who know him" (Rackham, 93). The parallel is also credited with moral import in Binns's suggestion that *The Tempest* "bodies out the moral dimension" (1973, 323) of the novel, so that Calibanity becomes equated with the collector instinct that prompts Clegg's abduction of Miranda.

(3) She also refers to Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* in a similar manner: "Marianne is me; Eleanor is me as I ought to be" (213).

(4) Discussions of the provincial "Angry young novel" and its relationship to *The Collector* are provided by Conradi (32-33), Huffaker (73-75) and Churchill (82-83). These accounts suggest that, if Clegg is the heir to the typical anti-hero of these novels, he is placed within a moral frame that condemns rather than condones his actions.

(5) Palmer's reading also acknowledges this art/photography dualism. Photography is "mechanical, purely imitative, and literal, while art is human, original, expressive, and often abstract. The photographer is only a techni-

cian, an appendage to a machine, but the artist becomes humanly involved with his subject" (1974, 38).

(6) For purposes of this discussion, I will speak in the 'voice' of commentators who endorse such a reading. My own position and focus will become clearer as I begin to mediate between novel positions and critical readings later in this essay.

(7) Wolfe (78) and Burden (34) offer identical perspectives, linking Clegg's language to the Many/inauthenticity.

(8) Wolfe takes up this critical stance in somewhat euphuistic terms: "Miranda's style bespeaks her artistic, outgoing nature. It sparkles with color and sound. She uses language like daubs of paint on a sketchpad. Her lyrical, loose-jointed sentences hold together by free association; she sometimes uses one-word paragraphs...her rippling, imagistic prose abounds in sentence fragments. A painter by preference and training, she adapts well to the medium of words. So eager is she to try new modes that she writes part of the diary as a play with dialogue and stage directions" (78).

(9) Wolfe also offers a (somewhat idiosyncratic) list of similarities between Miranda and Clegg (76).

(10) It should be noted that my account is not intended as a defence of Clegg. While it admittedly downplays his criminal actions and the considerable threat under which Miranda feels herself to be, there is no doubt that his is a morally repulsive act (and wholly 'inauthentic'). My focus, however, is on the way in which definitions of art and language (and assumptions of what constitutes art) contribute to and underpin notions of selfhood and authenticity and how these categories are disrupted in the novel.

(11) This may be contrasted with Palmer's claim that for Clegg "metaphors are unintelligible. He cannot cope with abstractions or impressions or emotions because his mind is chained to the literal" (1974, 34).

(12) While Nodelman's reading similarly draws on the protagonists' use of class and gender discourses, he reaches different conclusions, suggesting that their conventionality is destructive and life-denying: "...*The Collector* brilliantly reveal[s] how heroines – and heroes – who unthinkingly accept and then lust after the life-denying ideals implied by conventional social and sexual attitudes may be the most life-denying of all human beings" (346). Simard's insights into the use of language in the narratives also moves away

from the Bakhtinian perspective of my stance in his claim that Miranda is finally no more 'authentic' than Clegg because she is a 'collector' whose ideas are not translated into reality: "There is nothing truly vital in her life because the ideas are not used in physical reality" (82).

(13) Huffaker claims that the "greatest fallacy" (76) in criticism of *The Collector* is to identify "Fowles's viewpoint with Miranda's – assuming that he believes the liberal-modish clichés which he writes in her journal, as well as her occasional diatribes of class prejudice" (76). However, as I have argued, it is precisely the fact that Miranda is an uneasy blend of moral mouthpiece and independent "character" that leads to ambiguity in the novel. Wolfe's suggestion that Miranda "carries her narrative burden less well [than Clegg]" (68) implicitly recognises her problematic status in the novel.

(14) Similarly, if the "world of *The Collector* swerves away from the sanity and order of Jane Austen's comic world...as the novel descends into the insane, chaotic world of tragedy" (Palmer, 1974, 15), it does not reject *Emma / Sense and Sensibility*, allowing them as models of the novel of moral maturation.

(15) Aspects of romance in the novel are covered by Binns and by Loveday, while Higdon (1986) correlates *The Collector* with the medieval romance tradition.

(16) The designation 'romance' covers both Clegg's appropriation of and aspiration towards a particular class-based language and the intertextual use of a particular literary model which 'silences' class relations.

(17) Noteworthy in this respect are Huffaker's comments that "Miranda's diary shows her working out her own reality through a sort of fiction" (88), up to the point that she can "discard completely her old "Ladymont" self, her middle-class pettiness, and her artistic arrogance as well" (88). Miranda's journal "helps her to an amplified self-recognition" (89) because she "uses her narration to *expose* her old self" (my emphasis, 89). Also relevant is Palmer's analysis of the mirror image in *The Collector* (206 – 207) whereby "For the first time, [Miranda] looks within and finds her "real" self, the genuine Miranda..." (1974, 98).

(18) This serves as a reply to those critics (cited earlier) who vouch for Miranda's creativity in her use of a variety of forms, especially "drama".

(19) Revealingly, Palmer claims that "Aesthetic metaphors are [Miranda's] only means of self-expression" (1974, 33). As such, "throughout the novel all of her words die because they are couched in a medium Clegg can *never* understand" (my emphasis, 33)

(20) Nodelman usefully lists those critics who make claims for Miranda's moral growth (332-333). My own position is not that Miranda does not grow (though I would not posit a radical change in her) but that her progression is always discursive and predicated on the conventional norms available to her.

(21) Huffaker makes the comment that "The biological disparity is between the intelligent and the ignorant, but the fighting is between the haves and the have-nots. As an artist, Miranda is really at neither pole in the materialistic war; that is why her tragedy is so intense. She seeks freedom to create, but falls victim to society's economic struggle" (90). This implies that art really has nothing to do with class. However, as I have argued, what qualifies as art in the novel (and in critical readings) is firmly based on class-tendential linguistic distinctions and, furthermore, 'art' becomes a site of struggle as Clegg strives for Miranda's 'language'. Similarly, the notion that *The Collector* is concerned with "social sickness" (Fawkner, 74) so that Clegg becomes symptomatic of a "specific social class loosely called the "New People": drab, petit-bourgeois social climbers... who have become spiritually dead in a cultural vacuum..." (73) depends on certain ideas about what constitutes a worthy 'culture'.

THE MAGUS

(1) All references in this discussion are to the revised edition of *The Magus* (1977). Discussions which compare and contrast old and revised versions of the novel may be found in Binns (1976), Boccia and Wainright.

(2) It should be noted that *The Magus*, too, does not employ *mise en abyme* proper for, while Conchis's embedded narratives clearly occupy a narrative level inferior to the primary diegetic world, Nicholas's recounting of his involvement with Conchis's world (his 'reading' of Conchis's text) belongs to the primary narrative level.

(3) Churchill takes up this issue, discussing Fowles's differences from the novels of provincial realism of the fifties and sixties. Huffaker also minimally

compares the questing hero of *The Magus* to the passive anti-heroes of such fiction (57, 71).

(4) Nicholas's response to Alison's 'death' – "I...had begun to edge it out of the moral world into the aesthetic, where it was easier to live with" (401) – is often also cited as evidence for Nicholas's treatment of art as escapism. Like De Deukans, he embodies the "twentieth century retreat from content into form, from meaning into appearance, from ethics into aesthetics" (402).

(5) Since most commentators give detailed accounts of this existential *rite de passage*, my own account is deliberately brief and functional. Comprehensive coverage of Nicholas's existential 'becoming' may be found in Huffaker, Palmer (1974), Wolfe, Eddins and Binns, among numerous others.

(6) McDaniel (1981) supplies a detailed reading of *The Magus* as a Tarot quest, while Fleishman and Wolfe deal with references to mythic heroes and initiation rites. Olshen's analysis covers mythological, psychological, philosophical and mystical analogies and Binns (1973) and Loveday treat the romance aspects of the novel.

(7) Fawkner comprehensively accounts for the use of different states of time in The *Magus*. Further evidence which he adduces for the 'timelessness' of the Godgame is its setting in Greece which stands for unchangingness, the 'timeless' truths of the art and culture of ancient Greece and the cosmic time of nature, as opposed to the finite, "public clock" time of civilisation (90). The twin actresses also belong to time and timelessness. Lily/Julie who has studied the classics (Latin and Greek) "stands for timelessness – both in the role of romantic mistress and in that of a schizophrene who has lost all sense of time" (90). Rose/June, conversely, who has studied modern languages stands for time, as does Alison (90).

(8) Palmer (1974) gives a detailed account of the use of spatial metaphors as they affect Nicholas's journey to self-knowledge, showing how interior spaces (suggestive of imprisonment) become the site of enlightenment and a consequent outward movement (87-92).

(9) Since my interest is in developing a critical paradigm for the functioning of art in *The Magus*, I do not offer a semantic/thematic analysis of the various symbols and episodes of the Godgame and their interrelations. It is evident, however, that the contrived incidents offered to Nicholas are aimed at prototypical modern 'inauthenticities', ranging from patriotism (World War

One and the dice incident), to the collector instinct (De Deukans), to rationalism (Henrik the Norwegian mystic) to sexual selfishness (Lily/Julie and Rose/June, the Apollo masque). Nicholas is, consequently, taught about the importance of freedom, choice and Hazard (the Greek Resistance episode, the Trial scenario). Commentators cover aspects of the Godgame with varying degrees of comprehensiveness but Huffaker, Wolfe, and Palmer (1974) offer fairly broad general discussions of these elements.

(10) Ironically, however, Nicholas's 'incorrect' reading is simultaneously a 'correct' reading, for the Godgame has to immerse him in 'inauthenticity' in order to teach him how to read properly. The Godgame, consequently, is programmed to encourage such an 'incorrect' reading in order to expose and correct it. Nicholas, therefore, is not a "radically free giver of meaning" (Fossa, 174) in respect to the Godgame for, if he is allowed to read 'freely' (and make mistakes), this is to enable the Godgame to signpost him to a 'correct' authorial reading which, paradoxically, teaches him to become an authentic "giver of meaning" via art (for the postmodern implications of Nicholas's reading of the Godgame, see pages 46-48 of this chapter).

(11) Palmer (1980) picks out a number of such metaphors, concentrating on images of the "stumbling *naif* fallen into a swirling, spell-binding vortex" (69). The elements of sadism and violence in the Godgame may also be a graphic demonstration of the coerciveness and power of art and the degree of disturbance it provokes in Nicholas.

(12) Chambers's theory of narrative seduction interestingly confirms this notion that fictionality need not be an alienation device. Fictions openly employ seduction, he claims, as a "phenomenon of persuasion" (212) in order to "achieve authority and produce involvement" (212). Thus, fictionality establishes a consensus between text and reader: the desire to know and the desire to tell. Nicholas's reference to the "erotic in all collusion" (346) validates this point.

(13) Nicholas's 'fall' into art (suggested also by his poem, "I am the Fool that falls", 95) is not a condition of loss but a 'fortunate fall' which leads to greater reward. The notion of the fall also prefigures Sarah's fiction of 'fallen woman' in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* which is equally a redemptive state.

(14) Conchis's name also derives from the Conch shell, thereby alluding to the deep inner resonances of the Godgame which structurally resembles it. The Urfe/Earth identification hints, too, at Nicholas's malleability, so that

he is shaped by Conchis, as God shaped man (Marais, 18). The surname Urfe links Nicholas with the French writer, Honore d' Urfe, whose novel *La Astrée* contains parallels with *The Magus* (discussed in detail by Poirier, 1980), while the names Nicholas and Alison are also those of the lovers in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale* (see Harris).

(15) Alison is also linked structurally with Conchis, Lily and Rose via her name. Alongside the "white arum lily and rose" (556) that Nicholas finds on Conchis's 'grave', there are a "cushion of inconspicuous flowers", later identified as "*Alysson maritime...parfum de miel* from Greek *a* (without) *lyssa* (madness)... In English: *Sweet Alison* (566). She is equally an accomplice of the Magus, participating in an educative process that induces *sanity* in Nicholas.

(16) The term Godgame for Conchis's spectacle appears ironic in terms of Mrs de Seitas's comment that "...there is no God, and it is not a game" (625). According to many commentators, Conchis behaves as a controlling God in order to show Nicholas that there is no God (see Mack Hill, 212, for example) releasing him into a contingent world where he must take responsibility for his life by means of responsible acts of choice. However, as I will argue, the novel's reflexive commentary on the status of art challenges this reading to some extent.

(17) It has been claimed that the Godgame not only exposes inauthenticity but itself mirrors it, so that it becomes emblematic of lies, deception and distortion of the real (see Rackham, 96, for example). However, my discussion suggests that the Godgame's very 'unreality' might be a source of value and authenticity for Nicholas.

(18) One of the problems with the art/life argument that this essay challenges is that there is no clear termination point of the Godgame. Nicholas's trial is presumably the culmination of his experience at Bourani, ending as it does with Conchis's statement, "I come to tell you that you are now elect" (531) and his Prospero-like exit. Yet the trial is itself clearly a highly worked piece of artifice (drawing on mysticism, psychology and theatricality) which gives way to further fictions. Mrs de Seitas's explanation of the Godgame is also a potential conclusion ("The Godgame is over", 625) yet itself is highly contrived and leads to another 'fiction' as Nicholas encounters Alison in Regent's Park. Nicholas's response to Conchis's metatheatre analogy, "This did make slightly more sense than his previous "explanations", but he

apparently remained ludicrously blind to the fact that he had destroyed even the remotest hope of my ever believing anything he said again" (404) can be applied to the novel as a whole, denying the Godgame a definitive culmination point.

(19) Conchis evidently employs a huge supporting cast, including members of the school where Nicholas teaches. Even Jojo and Kemp, two prosaic characters who surely belong to 'life', can be adduced as part of Nicholas's sexual education, representing sister and mother figures, respectively. Scholes's claim that Nicholas's interaction with them allows him to "assume his place in the human family" (43) should be treated with caution.

(20) A few critics have acknowledged such an epistemological function. Bradbury calls the Godgame "an exercise in timeless and traditional hermetic symbolism" (268), constituting a "structure for the comprehension of Urfe's world" (269), as does Holmes, calling the Godgame a "large-scale explanatory structure" (1985a, 51).

(21) This mystery, artifice and ambiguity of 'life' could derive from the art frame through which Nicholas begins to 'see', problematising the unequivocal notion of a recovery of life.

(22) Hussey reads the insinuation of art into 'life' as threatening rather than redemptive, "tainting...reality with its suspect activities" (25). Nicholas must, consequently, recover the world, as must the reader (so that the metalepsis which announces the "admitted manipulations" (25) of the author serves as a disintoxicating device). Despite the merits of this reading, it is by no means clear that there is a definite entry point into life in the novel, nor does Hussey define what she means by life with any clarity.

(23) My discussion derives here from Jakobson's opposition of the poetic function of the message to its referential function. While referential language is outwardly directed, the poetic function "lays the stress on the palpable side of the signs, underscores the message for its own sake and deepens the fundamental dichotomy between signs and objects" (356).

(24) In this light, the difference between real and fake break down. The discovery that Conchis's 'real' artworks are reproductions or that Wimmel, the Nazi commander, is 'really' an actor specialising in such roles does not diminish the significance of the Godgame (itself a large-scale 'fake') for Nicholas.

(25) This view needs some glossing for, as Ricoeur explains, "what happens [in art] is not the suppression of the referential function but its profound alteration by the workings of the ambiguity of the message itself" (151). What art does is to suspend ordinary reference (and, by implication, reality itself). This is similar to the existential position which does not seek to deny external reality, reducing the world to the idealist workings of the mind, but to prevent outside forces – social, moral and cultural institutions – from being wholly determinate.

(26) This may be taken as referring strictly to rational discourse which claims an objective status. However, I have used it in a wider sense as referring to form and structure, in general. Since art is a prime exemplar of structuring, it is by no means exempt from censure.

(27) In this light, Holmes's recognition that "one should not complacently assume the existence of an accessible core of reality beyond artifice" (1985a, 52) clearly derives from the aesthetic autocommentary while his contradictory claim that "at its best art is not an evasion of reality but a heightening of it" (1985a, 48) stems from the novel's contrasting existential agenda, demonstrating its split affinities.

(28) Billy presents a related argument in describing the novel as a "cosmic metaphor for the illusory nature of experience" (129). Fowles's "creative art reflects experience but steadfastly refrains from interpreting it" (129) so that his "labyrinth like the inscrutable universe itself, has no centre, no rational meaning" (132). Nicholas's frustrated "desire to reach the centre" (132) is matched by the reader's experience of the novel which is "equivalent to living" (129) since "Absolute understanding, in either case, is impossible" (129) and "Fowles inculcates no universal truths" (129). Novak, though arguing from different premises, claims that, since " "Hazard" (chance) and chaos lie at the heart of [Conchis's] philosophy (75), he is unable to "advance any meaningful, transcendent truths or values" (75).

(29) Hussey makes similar claims, calling *The Magus* "at once an implicitly self-affirming and self-effacing work" (20), employing fictions to "show off its own limits" (21). Admission of fictiveness, then, permits the "self-aware novelist to write without being guilty of existential *mauvaise foi*" (23). Conradi states that the novel "uses illusion to disillusion but foregrounds its formal anxieties about doing so" (51), while Bradbury contends that the novel must maintain a necessary dialectic between art as "binding structure for

modern experience" and the "fictiveness of that structure" (264) because in "an age of prolix contingencies the novelist is hard put to give them any necessary order" (264). (See also, Fleishman, 301, 313, Binns, 1973, 330, Binns, 1976, 82, Churchill, 86, Kennedy, 254, 256, Holmes, 1985b, 348, McDaniel, 1985, 58, Loveday, 46, Huffaker, 62).

(30) Whether the novel is open-ended or not has aroused some critical debate. The argument for open-endedness is based on the metaleptic voice which declares that:

> An ending is no more than a point in a sequence, a snip of the cutting shears. Benedick kisses Beatrice at last; but ten years later? And Elsinore, that following spring? (645)

This is regarded as further evidence for the undermining of art since life itself has no such neat resolutions. The novel, consequently, refuses to suggest a reunion between Alison and Nicholas ("...to say she returns is a lie", 645) and confirms that Nicholas's 'life' will be played out beyond the end-point of the novel ("But what happened in the following years shall be silence; another mystery", 645). However, the claims of the voice are surely to be read ironically since the entry of the "author" proclaims the textuality of the narrated events and his spectacular ability to arrange the fates of his characters (so that 'Nicholas' actually has no existence beyond the novel's end, his retrospective stand being an authorial contrivance). Thus, the novel *does* achieve a significant ending. This does not necessarily have to be the closed ending claimed by Palmer who cites the use of phoenix, autumnal and mythic imagery and the optimistic Latin epigraph with which the novel ends as evidence for a reunion with Alison (1974, 105 – 108). The fact that the novel ends in a position of choice (see Campbell, 1983, 52, Fossa, 178) is in itself a fitting 'ending' to an existential novel (See my commments on page 43 of this essay for the postmodern implications of this view). My own suggestion that the existential discourse is facilitated by the art discourse, in fact, posits Art as the final position of the novel. In this way, the novel does not represent art giving way to contingency but the ability of art to suspend reality/contingency so as to provide order and meaning that are in themselves a redemption and a resolution.

(31) It is significant that Conchis's bookshelf comprises mainly autobiographies and biographies (103), revealing the Godgame's preoccupation with the fictional, textualised self.

(32) What I refer to as "postmodern" in this discussion are isolated moments in the text which explicitly restore its 'worldliness'. My reading, in this sense, is somewhat artificial, extending the insights offered by these instances and re-evaluating material in their light.

(33) Discussions of *The Magus* employing Jungian concepts are provided by Raper, Huffaker, Eddins and Rubenstein.

(34) Discussions which recover a single discourse (existential, Jungian, mystical, *et al*) as the explanatory paradigm of the novel, consequently, bypass this postmodern 'framing' of generic codes which provides a reflexive account of signification processes themselves. McDaniel's contention that by rehearsing the "older established quest patterns" (1981, 249), Fowles announces a need for a "new set of mythic symbols, for a myth less shopworn, a journey less travelled" (249) seems to gesture towards a postmodern recognition of conventional repertoires. However, McDaniel's privileging of the Tarot myth as final "signified" – an updated structure able to account for the "ironic sense in the journeys of modern heroes" – means that her reading, finally, does not take a postmodern 'turn'.

(35) Nicholas's hypotheses, then, are not simply an inauthentic response to Conchis's 'mysteries', showing the futility of the "rational mind's attempt to penetrate mystery" (Ziegler and Bigsby, 111) but a valid response to textual mechanisms that is true of all reading (see Rimmon-Kenan, 121).

(36) Nicholas, significantly, calls Lily/Julie a "type of encounter" (653) near the novel's end.

(37) The mystery of the Godgame, consequently, is not simply an inherent property but that which Nicholas, equipped with particular overdetermined literary/discursive notions, invests in it. Paradoxically, mystery is both that which the Godgame aims to instill in Nicholas and that of which he must be purged.

(38) Reading, thus, serves to increase Nicholas's "culture", his semiotic competence. This assumption is compatible with existential/Jungian readings which suggest that Nicholas must unlearn certain 'inauthentic' externally dictated behaviours and gender related perceptions. However, such readings presume a 'real' self, able to emerge from oppressive constructs. A postmodern reading, conversely, always works with a concept of the self/subject as it is constituted by the ambient discourses of its 'world'. The proble-

matic interrelations of such a notion of the self and that of existential authenticity are examined in detail in the chapter on *The French Lieutenant's Woman* so as to avoid repetition.

(39) The convergence of a number of generic/discursive identities on Nicholas as he participates in the Godgame (drawn from literary and socio-cultural arenas) serves to bracket the notion of an autonomous, coherent self experiencing a process of growth, suggesting that no representation or metaphor may adequately account for the self.

(40) Conchis makes the 'world' available to Nicholas through preformed texts, codes and representative orders. History, for example, becomes a matter of different stories, forms of telling and conventional props (the Nazi invasion of Greece, for example, is relayed through dramatic performance complete with popular songs, war apparel and 'Teutonic' types, oral narrative, a film, documents). In this way, Nicholas's personal text (his journey of self-discovery) is played out against the major socio-cultural and historical 'texts' of the twentieth century. He is shown, therefore, that 'seeing' is always discursively and historically programmed (102, 149), an issue explored more overtly in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN

(1) See, for example, Johnstone and Rose.

(2) See, for example, Brantlinger, Adam and Rothblatt.

(3) Numerous commentators have taken this approach, the most notable including Campbell (1983), Eddins and Rankin.

(4) While my argument is similar to Siegle's in many respects, its premises differ considerably, as will become clear in this discussion. While I read Siegle only after my own work was substantially formulated, I have tried to incorporate his remarks wherever possible and to acknowledge points on which we appear to concur.

(5) Artistic fictions may still be differentiated from everyday ones by their greater ability to lead out the motivations engaged in the very act of constituting 'reality'.

(6) Costa, Kaplan (1973) and McEwan, among others, provide detailed commentary on the Victorian elements of the novel.

(7) Johnson importantly argues that by pushing realist conventions (the varieties of which he discusses in detail) beyond their usual boundaries and removing the "separating frame" (294) between novel and world, Fowles is able to show that "'realism", "truth to reality", unfiltered fidelity to the world we live in, is ultimately not what the traditional novel has presented or even tried to present, even while implicitly endorsing the rumour that it has" (290). Similar defences of realism (unrelated to *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) are mounted by Tallis who suggests that realism is not a mere copying of the external but a selective, shaped rendering of a "huge panorama of realities" (my emphasis, 20) and by Levine who contends that "Naive realism in art is both a theoretical and practical impossibility" (250) since language always interposes itself between writer and subject through organising perceptions, literary genres and cultural conventions. Barthes's *S/Z* is perhaps the most spectacular display of this argument.

(8) Binns (1973) and Loveday provide useful discussions of romance elements in the novel, although they tend to "isolate and analyse" them as if they were the "style of the whole" (Bakhtin, 263) rather than a mode within a postmodern parodic metacommentary.

(9) In fact, she serves as Sarah's 'double' since she is literally the prostitute (fallen woman) that Sarah claims to be, having been similarly abandoned by her soldier lover, and since the experience Charles undergoes with her is an important part of the 'education' that the other Sarah sets in motion. However, as an attempt to exorcise the 'real' Sarah, the episode fails utterly.

(10) According to Sartre, "existential novels" should be "toboggans, forgotten, unoticed, hurling the reader into the midst of a universe where there are no witnesses" and should "exist in the manner of things, of plants, of events, and not at all like the products of man" (1950, 229). As he suggests, "In a novel you must either tell all or keep quiet; above all, you must not omit or skip anything" (qtd. in Booth, 52).

(11) Fowles's oft-quoted remark on the genesis of the novel confirms this point:

> I was stuck this morning to find a good answer from Sarah. Characters sometimes reject all the possibilities one offers. They say in effect: I would never say or do a thing like that...After an hour over this one wretched sentence, I realised that she had in fact been telling me what to do: silence from her was better than any line she might have said. (1977, 147)

(12) As Siegle puts it, " "To create" narrative or any other discourse may indeed mean to be the God of that discourse, like the narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, but, then, to be a God in a semiotic universe is a very different thing from being one in the grand old metaphysical cosmos of a logocentric culture" (204). However, an issue not addressed by Siegle, and central to my account, is whether a semiotic universe is compatible with an existential one.

(13) The description of Christ as a "man...with a brilliant gift for metaphor" (312) places Christianity in the same category as the other constructs the narrator discusses.

(14) These two perspectives are played off dialectically so that hierarchical (existential) judgements are always made in awareness of the fragility of our own perspective on the past. A statements like:

> After all, he was a Victorian. We could not expect him to see what we are only just beginning – and with so much more knowledge and the lessons of existential philosophy at our disposal – to realize ourselves: that the desire to hold and the desire to enjoy are mutually destructive. (63)

contrasts with one like "Never was the record so completely confused, never a public facade so successfully passed off as the truth on a gullible posterity" (319), so that existential modern insights about a 'repressive Victorian age' are constantly qualified.

(15) Focusing on the Victorian epigraphs of the novel, Siegle suggest that they acquire "a distinctly existentialist cast not always entirely compatible with the value system implicit in the works from which they come" (190). The novel's treatment of the past, then, is seen in terms of "interpretative violence" (191).

(16) This takes on a further irony in that the aristocratic Charles is granted the privilege of moral salvation (becoming a member of yet another kind of aristocracy, Fowles's existential 'elect') while the servant Sam takes an 'inauthentic' step into the middle-class with its attendant bourgeois mind-set. Sam, in this light, becomes the forerunner of the Many epitomised by Clegg within a contemporary capitalist system that is the enemy of the existential individual and his/her creativity.

(17) This view of history has come to be prevalent through the work of Hayden White, Louis O. Mink, and others. While fiction has long sought to approximate history and appropriate its title so as to "affirm for [the] novel that

verisimilitude, that solid base in pre-existing fact, which is associated with the idea of history" (Hillis Miller, 457), history, conversely, "appears to detach itself from literature in order to associate with the social sciences and, more precisely, with their quantitative sectors" (Orr, 1986, 1). Now, however, a degree of rapproachment has been reached so that history itself has been recognised as a form of fiction because it is premised on narrative which imposes on 'real' historical processes the "formal coherency that only stories possess" (White, 23), participating in selective procedures which problematise the passage from "events" to "facts".

(18) Indeed, Siegle suggests that Fowles's list of alternatives that may or may not be his "intention" in chapter thirteen (85) offers a "series of other discourse systems in which [the novel] might be participating" (199).

(19) Since so many critical accounts take up this issue, this summary cannot be comprehensive, offering only representative views. With regard to the free choice standpoint, DeVitis and Palmer claim that the novel "forces the burden of responsibility directly onto the reader" (100), while Higdon, similarly, asserts that "the theme of freedom virtually dictates that choice be left up to the readers" (1984, 359). The argument for contingency/art is expressed by Cohen who contends that the linear plot "contains within itself the possibilities for different resolutions", thereby enabling Fowles to "incorporate chance in his fiction" (152) and to undercut the "notions of inevitability and rational order in art as well as in life" (156). (See also Eddins, Kellman, McDaniel, 1985, Walker). Arguments for the structural and thematic necessity of the final ending are provided by Hutcheon who suggests that "the painful freedom granting second ending of a modern novel is the only probable one" (1980, 69), by Creighton who suggests that "one ending is already programmed (222) and by Lodge who suggests that the closed endings do not occur at the end of the novel, nor do they satisfy thematic requirements (1981, 143). Palmer sees the refusal of the closed ending as liberatory since "Fowles's characters...refuse to be Victorianised (victimised, tyrannised)" (1974, 73) and Fowles defeats the "aesthetic chauvinism that has ruled the novel genre since the Victorian age" (1974, 76). Other critics have pointed out that "What the two endings illustrate is that Fowles the existentialist cannot escape the fate of being Fowles the poeta, the maker of others' destinies" (Scruggs, 97) and that the last ending is "no less manipulatory and coercive" (Ricks, qtd. in McEwan, 29).

(20) Guth comments that the last ending is more viable because it allows for the "evolving image of twentieth century woman" (251) unlike the other endings where "all originates in and reverts to the hero's imagination, the female image playing her responsive adoring role to the end" (251). While this is certainly valid, it is also still a matter of contemporary 'progressive' values winning out over what are seen as repressive Victorian ones. Furthermore, it is by no means certain that Sarah is freed of female images. Her final role as "Electric and Bohemian *apparition*" (my emphasis, 379) still exploits potent reserves of Female mystique and power. Indeed feminist critics (Michael, Waugh, 126 – 127) complain that Sarah is always contained in patriarchal ideology and imagery. (For my response to such readings, see pages 51 – 55 of this discussion).

(21) In this light, a reading like Campbell's which evaluates "whether what Fowles says about moral behaviour is true" (1983, 45) misses the novel's deconstruction of 'moral' premises.

(22) McEwan suggests that the novel validates realist practice by "restoring...its solid narrative comforts" (22), while Bradbury claims that Fowles's aim "seems to be to preserve as much humanism for the novel as can be got" (263). Other critics also discuss realism in the novel in revivalist terms: as an "endeavour to renegotiate the terms of our understanding of realism" (Johnson, 302), as a discussion of "how difficult it is to craft a mimetically "real" novel" (Creighton, 220), as the "salvation of the mimetic genre" (Hutcheon, 1980, 70). Burden (151) and Man (58) claim that the final ending is "realist" since its display of the need for character consistency and development belongs to a realist agenda. Fowles himself remarks that "One can almost invert the reality and say that Sartre and Camus have been trying to lead us, in their fashion, to a Victorian seriousness of purpose and moral sensitivity" (1977, 140). However, since the postmodern visitation of the past is always critical and ironic rather than nostalgic, the novel shows that *realisms* (and moral truths) are always historically validated, temporal and provisional, preventing any sense of a deferential realist revival.

(23) While I have used Derridean vocabulary here, Fowles does not take a line of radical textuality in the novel. Instead, he affirms the possibility of meaning via an appeal to the communal sense-making role of conventions in fiction and the 'world'. His historical frame may be sceptical about the possibility of "final signifieds" but it does square with 'reality' as it is semiotically mediated.

(24) This is precisely the role I claimed for fiction in *The Magus*. However, the overt historicity and conventionality of the postmodern autocommentary in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* work against the possibility of narrative as a site of "presence" and fullness.

(25) Sarah, to some extent, shares the narrator's ability to manipulate and appropriate discourses, in her case, the Victorian romance discourse. As a consummate artist/trickster figure, she illustrates her text with dexterity, dramatising her status as outcast by pricking her finger on the thorn of a hawthorn tree (158), literally enacting her fall (104), and carefully planning her final seduction of Charles in her hotel room in Exeter, though disclaiming it by a deliberately stammered "Forgive me. I...I did not expect" (346). These tactics appeal to Charles's Victorian 'gentlemanly' perceptions of the 'otherness' of women so that he submits readily to her seductive strategies: "He was at one and the same time Varguennes enjoying her and the man who sprang forward and struck him down, just as Sarah was to him both an innocent victim and a wild, abandoned woman" (153). Thus, Charles as her 'reader' is hailed into place as the "dupe of [her] imaginings" and himself adopts her romance script. This links him with Nicholas who 'reads' women in a similar manner, a factor which the Godgame exploits, like Sarah, as a mechanism of unlearning. However, Sarah's motivation and Charles's learning process are by no means as clear-cut as in *The Magus* (See page 68 of this discussion).

(26) Indeed, Sarah may be wholly 'inauthentic' in existential terms here since she assumes the identity of a "Being-For-Others", "adopting the form in which others see and label us" (Sartre, paraphrased in Caute, ix). She takes on the role society prescribes for her after she follows Varguennes, that of outcast and sinner, and uses it as a means of grasping (and manipulating) the shape of her own story.

(27) Guth calls Sarah an "image" which is not of the Victorian realist world of Mrs Poulteney's drawing-room (245), existing at an "archetypal" rather than a "temporal" level (246). This misses the point that Sarah's manipulates and inhabits a range of available images of the "eternal Feminine" (246). Thus, she herself is thoroughly temporal and wordly, though she acts within a preformed system of ethereal romance images for her own purposes.

(28) The use of the Darwinian analogy as a thematic backdrop in the novel is itself highly ambiguous. Posed as an alternative to a static Linnaean

classificatory scheme, the theory of evolution supports existential notions of change, flux and contingency. However, to become 'authentic' Charles must refuse to evolve, casting off the changes that history/evolution in the form of consumer capitalism thrusts at him (The emerging bourgeoisie is, after all, for Marx in *Das Kapital* the "progressive" social force of the age). Thus, he must remain within Victorian conventions which are wholly "inauthentic'. (For further discussion of this particular problem, see page 68 of this discussion).

(29) Siegle offers a more thorough and ambitious study of the 'author' in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* than I am able to undertake here. His argument is that concepts of 'authority', 'intentionality' and 'originality' attendent on the author's role are ironised, challenged and undermined in the novel.

(30) Some commentators regard Sarah and Charles as *mise en abyme* author/reader figures. Hutcheon, for instance, considers the novel to be a "chinese box structure" (1980, 57) which mirrors its own processes in a series of layers so that the metafictional concerns of the novel are "thematized" in the person of Sarah whose beneficent fictions grant Charles his thematised freedom from stultifying conventions (a process repeated at the level of the narrator/reader of Fowles's novel which is equally a moral freedom-inducing act, 60). One problem with this reading is its postulation of a kind of didacticism for fictions reminiscent of the expressive moral position of *The Collector*, bypassing the extent to which the reflexive concerns of the novel are deconstructive and ironic. Another is the notion that Sarah is an existential author, both for the model of metaphysical selfhood that implies, and for the tricky status of existentialism in the novel as it relates to the consciousnesses of the central protagonists (See pages 67 – 69 of this discussion).

(31) Smith takes this to an extreme, claiming that the novel is a literal piece of Hazard, so much so that the "reading of the book...is akin to reading a novelist's manuscript" (89).

(32) Exemplars of the first two readings are listed above (note 19). With regard to the third reading, Burden unites the novel's evolutionary scheme with contemporary anti-mimetic theories to read the novel as an "attempt to dramatise the need for the active transcendence of the 'ironic certainties' and rigid conventions of the Victorian age, as these shape its social reality and its art" (1979, 152). The novel's "historical continuum" (155) becomes the

"philosophical grounds for the systematic subversion of realism" (1979, 155), "made intelligible...through the instrument of existential philosophy" (1979, 152). Reflexivity, thus conceived, becomes the hallmark of the superior 'authenticity' of twentieth-century art. 'Liberatory' readings include Docherty's claim for "characters...who existentially create themselves in the writing of their own textual histoire" (119) and Hutcheon's suggestion that the narrator's creation of 'free' characters, in terms of respecting their "literary integrity", is an "allegory of his respect for the [existential selfhood] of other, non-fictional beings" (1980, 65). (See also Eddins's concept of "Authorship as existence")

(33) Existentialism is a *voluntaristic* philosophy, premised on the moral autonomy of the individual, while postmodernism is a kind of *determinism*, looking at discursive systems which precede individual consciousness and in which subjects are inevitably implicated. However, there is room for voluntarism to the extent that the "basic system of classification" (Kress and Hodge, 64) may "be subtly renegotiated by individuals" (64), resulting in an "oscillation between freedom and constraint" (64).

(34) Olafson's account of existentialism suggests that it is compatible with social and moral codes since we "cannot repudiate them *in toto* and continue to be the social beings they have made us" (214). However, my undoubtedly simplified treatment of existentialism derives from its presentation in the novel where Fowles seems to adopt a variety of radical individualism, focusing on the detachment of self from social and historical determinants rather than on a reconciliation of the individual to them. The vehemence of the metaphors used to describe social convention in the novel seem to confirm this: a "terrible machine" (130), the "catatonia of convention" (331), "opium fantasies" (179), etcetera.

(35) McDowell makes the important observation that the Victorian poets and thinkers cited in the epigraphs "were in the vanguard of the age, as were Sarah and Charles; they were also limited by it as Sarah and Charles also are...Sarah and Charles are like them: imperfectly emancipated..." (430). Perhaps the point is, however, that we are always imperfectly emancipated since we can never create new discourses or opt out of existing ones altogether (as the postmodern commentary reveals).

(36) Siegle astutely argues that the novel's case against "evaluative interpretation...imperils the novel's central thematic description of Charles's evol-

ution to a more authentic state of being" (179). Thus, he posits three authorial voices:

> One is a very contemporary recognition that an authorial voice must be caught within the "vocabulary" and "metaphor" of those external conventions contesting others (either contemporary or historical) for dominance. At the same time, a second voice is that of a kind of scientific positivism, insisting with an impossible rigour on the repudiation of any condescending temporal provincialism at the expense of the Victorians. A third seems unaware of the problem and cheerfully valorizes existential awakening. (180)

While this is a particularly ingenious and 'neat' way out of the problem, I would disagree with the notion of three coterminous voices. My argument is for a postmodern voice which invades the existential discourse and both allows for the dominance of a contemporary perspective and ironises it via a historicing, relativising frame. At this level, the third voice would cease to exist on its own terms, since the rhetorical interplay of codes, in effect, displaces it as final 'signified'. Bradbury's reading similarly posits three "voices":

> We may take the book as a very Whig novel about emancipation through history, with Victorian hypocrisy and ignorance yielding up to modern truth and authenticity, the whole enterprise aided by appropriately sympathetic techniques in which the characters are set free from the formal containments of traditional Victorian fiction. More obliquely and cunningly, we may take the book as a great pastiche novel, a novel of ironic counterpointings in which the present may make no such triumph over the past, in which emancipation is also a terrible exposure, a loss as well as a gain...There is a third possibility, which is that the modernist fiction is what is questioned, being attenuated and modified by the substance and realism of Victorian fiction. (257-258)

Once again, my reply would be that the voice of "ironic counterpointings" wins out so that the notions of modern triumph and a nostalgic revival of Victorian realism are undermined.

(37) Interestingly, Warnock has stated that "existentialism is prone to exaggeration" (1967, 35). Jameson's discussion of the "dominant form taken by ethics in our own situation" (60) whereby "...notions of personal identity, myths of the reunification of the psyche and the mirage of some Jungian 'self' or 'ego' stand in for the older themes of moral sensibility and ethical awareness" (60) confirms its status as a particular moral theme based on a centred self. Also pertinent is Fowles's admission in an interview that he "took

[existentialism] a lot too seriously, mainly because we were ignorant of French intellectual traditions and their rules of *rhetoric* " (my emphasis, in Barnum, 199).

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